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CATHOLIC THOUGHTS ON

THE BIBLE AND THEOLOGY

By the late FREDERIC MYERS, M.A.
PERPETUAL CURATE OF ST. JOHN'S, KESWICK

LONDON
DALDY, ISBISTER & CO.
56 LUDGATE HILL,
1879

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.

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PREFACE.

The object of the following pages is to present some suggestions respecting the study of the Bible and of Theology which may assist earnest inquirers in the formation of opinions at once enlightened and spiritual. And such suggestions seem at this time peculiarly required: for the present ecclesiastical controversies cannot much longer continue to be of interest for the more thoughtful, but will probably for such be superseded by others relating to questions of far deeper import, and of far more difficult solution. Indeed after a few years it will probably seem simply humiliating that questions which had been so frequently and so fully discussed in past ages, with everywhere uniformly the same kind of results, should have been supposed by us, without new data, to admit of any decisions essentially different from those which our fathers had so deliberately and repeatedly and emphatically pronounced. It cannot surely be long before it will be seen that there really never can be but one fundamental ecclesiastical question, which is this: whether the Idea of the Christian Church includes as essential a mediatorial priesthood, or exclusive caste of any kind, through which alone the blessings of Christianity can be conveyed and received: for if this be decided in the affirmative, there can be no

doubt whatever but that the Church of Rome possesses least ambiguously such a prerogative of priesthood, and in submission to it all other questions are virtually determined: or if it be decided in the negative, then there will be felt to be devolved upon the individual the responsibility of determining for himself, by the fullest and freest inquiry possible for him, the essential requirements of the Gospel. Now it is to any who have finely decided this great question in the negative, that these pages are offered as an aid in those further inquiries in which such a decision must involve them.

Among the first and chief of such inquiries must certainly be investigations respecting the authority and significance of that only remaining guide which professes to have special power to lead us heavenwards—the Sacred Scriptures: and then respecting the value of those Theological traditions which embody the results of our predecessors' interpretation of these Scriptures. And in the first portion of such inquiries, it at present appears to the writer of these pages that, before any permanently satisfactory result can be arrived at, there must be spoken some words likely to disturb the present opinions and feelings of the Christian majority among us. It appears to him that the claims which the Sacred Scriptures make for themselves, and those which are commonly made for them, are in some considerable measure diverse, and in some less degree incompatible: and that this being more and more felt to be the case, injury is constantly and increasingly arising to many from this conflict of claims—injury which might be greatly mitigated, if not wholly removed, by some calm and judicial adjustment of them. The existence of this injury is ad-

mitted very generally now, but of course the degree of it will be very variously measured by various minds according to their differing experience and sympathies. The present writer has been led to estimate that injury as very great. He knows that there are some—he believes that there are many—in almost every province of thought and of society, who are sufferers from popular injustice in this matter. There are not a few indeed who are driven into a very tumult of doubt, and are on the verge of more than scepticism, chiefly in consequence of claims being made for Holy Scripture which they believe that facts contradict, and of these claims being dogmatically declared to be the lowest which are consistent with elementary attainments in Christian truth, or even with any honesty of Christian profession. And others there are who having coming to the conviction that the popular tenets are untenable by them, and yet being prevented by more practical duties, or incapacitated by their educational deficiencies, from engaging in the investigations necessary to satisfy their minds as to the due extent of reserve which they ought to make in receiving the common traditions, are either on the point of giving up all independent thought on such matters and unintelligently acquiescing in the habits of those around them, or are always in bondage to the fear of transgressing the legitimate boundaries of freedom and of reverence. Such persons, it is thought, have great claims upon the aid of any of their brethren who, though wanting in many of those endowments and acquisitions with which these are blessed, yet have what they have not—either the leisure or the faculty for such investigations: and it is for the sake of such persons—persons in a state of doubt and difficulty, dissatisfied

with the old solution of scriptural problems but not knowing of the new—that these pages will be written. All others are here distinctly forewarned that they will very probably meet in them with the discussion of subjects which it will require a very large measure of calmness and of courage for them to engage in, and that there is no prospect of anything but discomfort to them, if they are at present quite satisfied with the opinions more generally received among the religious of our time and country.

Doubtless to any serious and sensitive mind it is a very grave thing to do, thus to enter into investigations which must almost unavoidably trouble any weak brethren into whose hands they may possibly fall: to the present writer it is one so grave as to be excitingly solemn, and nothing could encourage or enable him to undertake it but the belief that it is his duty to impart some of the best fruits which he has been, or may be, enabled to obtain from investigations which he has been permitted peculiar opportunities to pursue, and the consciousness that he has no inducement of any kind for forming any partial or unjust judgment. To do so is truly for him no act of intellectual, or other, self-indulgence, but rather one of considerable self-denial: and it is meant purely as an offering of Christian charity to some few who, amid many other greater gifts, may lack that one with which he has been favoured—the opportunity of unembarrassed and unbiassed contemplation. And after all it may not unfairly be said, that tenderness to the weak, though a high duty, is by no means the highest, nor is it nearly the only one, in such matters as these: and that so long as the claims of the less strong upon our sympathy are sedulously recognised and respected,

it may very lawfully be permitted us to attempt to furnish food more convenient for those who have their senses exercised to discern the subtler forms of good and evil. And he who knows much, or even only a little, of the modes of thought and feeling which exist among the more cultivated members of the various Churches of Christendom, will know that the questions herein discussed are no superfluous novelties, but that they are emphatically the questions which have for some time already engaged the frequent and careful attention of some of the foremost minds of our time, and are now deeply interesting many of those who are the most earnest. For indeed it is not only the least spiritual, but often rather the most so, who are engaged in such investigations, and who have come to conclusions which widely diverge from those which are with us at present the most popular. Among such are certainly some who personally realise the Christian ideal as fully as any who differ from them in opinion—men whose evangelical graces and good deeds might be coveted by any, and who in sympathy with the spirit of the New Testament, and in zeal for the propagation of its characteristic revelations, are not inferior to any of their generation.

Doubtless, on the other hand, there are many most pious persons, who occupy prominent stations in their several churches, and who are doing admirable service on the whole to the great cause of CHRIST, who are not aware, and cannot even be made so, of the difficulties which are felt by many on the subject of the composition and significance of the Sacred Scriptures, and who treat all expression of doubt concerning them as the mere indication of latent iniquity of heart, or of presumptuous abuse of the understanding,

They consider that state of mind which these pages would treat with sympathy and with reasoning so much a sin that it ought to be met only with stern rebuke and solemn warning, and if with pity yet also with denunciation equally commingled. For such this book can have but little interest, save of a painful kind: they can only regard it as an unlawful concession to the presumptuous claims of the natural mind, to be protested against on all fitting occasions, and if possible counteracted. But at the same time such should remember that in proportion to the greatness of the sin with which they charge their brethren ought to be not only their confidence in their own integrity, but the carefulness of their inquiries into the reasonableness of their own belief. So long as they merely follow the human traditions which they have received from their predecessors, and attach to them an uninquiring reverence, they are but too nearly repeating errors which have been Divinely rebuked to be worthy of especial respect; and if while suspecting the truth, they refuse to seek it because they fear that it may be dangerous to their old habits of thought and feeling, or to any merely personal interests, their belief or unbelief, their assent or dissent, concerning the matters to be herein treated of, must be regarded by the present writer as alike indifferent.

As regards the second portion of the inquiries with which these pages will be engaged, there will probably be found to exist the same difficulties and disadvantages, as Theology is with us so largely based on the letter of Scripture, and must of consequence be correspondingly affected by whatever may affect our hermeneutical and exegetical principles in our Scriptural studies. But whoever is, or has been, a

student of popular English Theology, and has had an opportunity of comparing it with that of other churches, will assuredly deem it capable of improvement in many ways, and more especially by expansion. By such an one it cannot but be regarded as too much a product of our insular culture, and as bearing traces throughout it all of the various epochs which have characterised the progress of our national history. Nor will such an one fail to remark how singularly rigid it is: how it is textual, verbal, every way literal, beyond all others: not simply based upon Biblical principles, but chiefly constructed of Biblical elements; treating the Bible as the whole revelation of the ways of GOD, and professing to be governed equally by its letter and its spirit. The good and evil of such a state it is not intended here to weigh and adjust, but only to take occasion from the statement of the fact to suggest that, such being the case, it is above all things important for us to consider frequently with patience the grounds of our methods of Scriptural interpretation; inasmuch as where false views are admitted in these, the erroneous Theological consequences following from them in our case will probably be more numerous than in any other, and the eradication of them produce interferences with popular traditions more important. And what is true of our Theology, is true of all Theology hitherto propounded: in a less degree indeed, but still in a degree which renders it very desirable that the study of it should henceforth be more careful and less dogmatic than it has been. For truly the errors of Theology, as well as those of Theologians, have been the direct cause of much irreverence towards the Bible. It has been, and is, the fearful manner in which the

Bible's holy words and blessed revelations have been made to minister to human presumption and uncharitableness, and to sanction many kinds of ignorance, that has involved the Scriptures themselves in something of the same aversion with which almost all Theologies have not altogether unreasonably been treated: and it is this, too, which compels those who would fain speak only of the glory and the beauty of the Bible—of its heavenly power to heal the soul's sicknesses and to satisfy the heart's inmost needs —to define and to measure the limits of its mission, and to separate between the venerable vesture and the sacred substance which it clothes.

But while speaking thus of the degree in which the writer foresees that these pages will probably differ from the more generally received traditions concerning both the significance of the Scriptures and the value of Theology, it must at the same time be said that at present he does not perceive that essential Christianity is in any way prejudiced by such difference; but, on the contrary, he is full of hope that it may be hereby cleared from incumbrances which hitherto have impeded its progress and obscured its evidence. At present, indeed, he believes that it is by changes far less extensive than much of the later criticism would demand, that a conciliation may be honestly effected between progressive scholarship and traditional faith: and that many recent speculations, both in this country and abroad, are in some considerable measure the mere temporary consequences of that state of re-action which has almost always been found to take place after a period of undue exaction and restraint. And also so far as it may be allowable to prophesy at all, it may be said that the

ecclesiastical disputes of our time and country are likely to produce among us for some years to come an unhealthy scepticism as to more important matters, on the part of many of those who have been attracted to religious subjects by the large promises which these discussions held out to them, but have ultimately found such discussions to be only deceptive and unprofitable. Any effort to obtain unjust dominion which fails can scarcely do otherwise than increase disproportionately the desire for liberty; and so much so, that for a while nothing is deemed liberty but that which at other times would be deemed licence. The faith of a healthy mind, however, tends always to calmness and to reverence, and when the excitement of the present ecclesiastical fever has passed off (as it assuredly must do soon), though it may leave a temporary exhaustion of strength and irritability of nerve, it will doubtless be followed by that normal state of the spiritual powers which will suffice for the impartial determination of the greater questions which must inevitably succeed. And it is supposed that such suggestions as may he here recorded, may have some special value for this very reason, that they will be the result of studies carried on with a clear foresight and full appreciation of the danger of such injurious and disturbing influences.

Finally; it is not within the plan of the following pages to enter in detail upon the criticism connected with the multiplied subjects herein intended to be spoken of: the object of this book rendering it unnecessary, as this is not to display generally the grounds for doubt and controversy which exist in connection with Biblical and Theological studies, but to meet the wants and remove the dissatis-

factions of those who have already been disturbed, and it may be distressed, by long being conversant with such criticism. But at the same time these thoughts are addressed not especially to the learned, but emphatically to the thoughtful of all classes—to the earnest truthful student whatever be his stage of scholarship—and every one of such will here be put in possession of such outlines of the case as may be necessary for forming a just judgment upon it, or at least of substantially the same means for so judging as the writer himself has. Implicitly indeed there may readily be traced many references to the opinions of many individuals and societies, of these and of other times, but explicitly there will be none designedly: it being desired to present the subjects herein treated of unencumbered by the prejudices almost invariably accompanying names and denominations, individual and ecclesiastical.

May THE HOLY SPIRIT guide us into all necessary truth, and guard us from all considerable error, for JESUS CHRIST'S sake. Amen.

20*th September* 1841.

CATHOLIC THOUGHTS

THE THIRD BOOK

THE BIBLE

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CATHOLIC THOUGHTS

ON

THE BIBLE AND THEOLOGY.

THE Books commonly called the Bible contain special revelations of the will of GOD, and the only written ones extant upon earth. They constitute a volume which is a Divine supplement to the laws of nature and of conscience: a body of doctrines and of precepts which, when rightly received, are able to make men wise unto salvation, and without which no man can be perfectly instructed in righteousness, or thoroughly furnished unto good works. These writings therefore as a whole are generically different from all others in character and authority: of incomparably greater dignity, of immeasurably higher worth, even emphatically sacred: a special Divine gift to man wholly inestimable, and one which it is impossible to regard with too much either of reverence or of gratitude. Indeed clearly on its first aspect there lies an impress of Divinity on the Bible not visible elsewhere: the Spirit of GOD so moves upon the face of its pages, that compared with all other Scriptures the Bible is holy, they profane. This book is a record not merely of the most valuable of man's speculations and dis-

Difference between the Bible and other books.

coveries concerning truth, but emphatically of GOD'S Revelations and instructions concerning it: not merely an exposition of such laws and precepts as the reasonings and intuitions and sentiments of men have agreed to pronounce the wisest and the worthiest, but of such direct and special communications of the Divine Spirit to the spirits of individual men as disclose purposes of GOD, and sanctions of duty, and promises of help, which no man by searching could find out, but which it is the everlasting life of man to take heed to, and his spiritual death to disregard. And it is not only thus a providential depository of certain Revelations of truth and duty which have been made at sundry times and in extraordinary manners, without the anticipation or effort of men, and even often contrary to their will, and ordained of GOD as a special scheme of education for a portion of His creatures on earth: but it is also a register of the workings of GOD'S Spirit on man's in all ages of the world from the first, divinely ordered and preserved for the instruction of all men of all time, so that its facts, as well as its precepts, constitute a special manifestation of GOD'S character and will.

And also when we look even for a moment at the history of this book, and carefully endeavour to contemplate the influence for good which it has exerted in the world, and the grand web of interests and events which have been, and which are, connected with it, we must ever regard it with feelings such as never can be associated with any other on earth. The number of the individual souls which this book has nourished and blessed, and the magnitude and variety of the institutions to which it has given rise—how it has mingled itself with the deepest thoughts and

feelings and utterances of men, and how this has been more and more the case the more spiritual and cultured the ages have become—these, too, are considerations which at once and alone must compel every religious soul to render a homage to the Bible the most sincere and the most profound.

II.

It is the Record of many Revelations.

But though the Bible is this, and very much more than this, it is not either a Revelation concerning all necessary knowledge, or wholly Revelation at all. It is rather only a Divine communication of such portion of necessary knowledge concerning man's origin and destiny, his duties and his hopes, as he could not of himself conclusively determine. Its whole aim throughout is ethical and spiritual: it is concerned altogether with the formation of man's character through the exhibition of GOD's; its subject and object are essentially one—the education of the soul of man for re-union with his Maker. And thus too the Bible is not merely, or chiefly, a book of maxims and of precepts everywhere formally didactic, but it is a history also of Divine acts, and of the unfolding of Divine ideas, continually manifesting the superintendence of a Divine sovereignty: not a history of the world, or of all GOD's Providence in it, but only of one kingdom and society, which was elected out of the rest to exhibit principles applicable to all kingdoms and societies, and to preserve certain privileges with which it was provisionally endowed in order that they might ultimately be extended to the whole race of man.

And therefore though the Bible is a book so sacred and

unique as a whole, it is one of very composite character and very complex construction, made up of parts, and containing materials, of quite various kinds. It is not one record of one Revelation, but a series of records of many Revelations, made at sundry times and in divers manners. It is a collection of Scriptures which extend over a period of fifteen hundred years, the most modern of which is more than seventeen centuries old, and the earliest of which cannot have an antiquity of less than three thousand years. And these writings are as various in their forms as they are in their dates: comprising the earliest traditions of our race: genealogies and biographies: abstracts of national chronicles and details of domestic narrations; visions and prophecies: songs and prayers: proverbs and parables and epistles: and varieties of composition nowhere else to be met with. In fact the Bible is not so much a book as it is a library: by no means indeed an encyclopædia, or systematic exposition of all the truths and facts which it is necessary for man to know, but rather a vast series of documents more justly bound together by spiritual than by literal bonds: constituted into one coherent whole rather by the Providence of GOD than by any wisdom of man.

The Bible therefore ought always to be considered only as a partial and not as an universal Revelation, and as rather a providential than a miraculous gift of GOD to man. It is but a part of a large system of Divine influence on man, the complete elements of which we cannot number, and the whole boundaries of which we cannot measure. Scripture Revelation is only that part of GOD'S Revelation of Himself which is written—it is by no means the whole. All the constitution of the realms of matter and of spirit

with which we are conversant or of which we are conscious, are Divine adaptations and aids to human culture, and the Bible, as it has already been said, is but as a supplement to these, or rather perhaps their complement.

And also, the Bible is not the Revelation itself, but only the record of the Revelation: and many modifications of its value, and of our views of it, are introduced by this consideration. There may be a large element that is purely human thus connected with it. The Bible cannot therefore necessarily be considered as an utterance of pure truth, as if it were a Divine dictation registered as supernaturally as it was revealed: for however pure the Revelation may have been when first made, yet the recording of that Revelation may have been subject to all the infirmities which are characteristic of ordinary human Scriptures.

III.

The Revelations are progressive.

And when we examine, however superficially, the contents of this composite volume which we so justly term Holy Scripture, we see further that it is naturally divisible, as it is commonly divided, into two distinct parts—the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures—parts separated from each other by an interval of more than four hundred years in the dates of their composition, and by their being written in different languages. We see also that the Divine utterances which the older Scriptures contain are more frequently than otherwise addressed to special hearers and accommodated to their peculiar circumstances. And not only this: but by far the larger part of this earlier division is occupied with

history rather than with Revelation—a history doubtless which has a certain supernaturally didactic character connected with it, but yet one which is largely human and nowhere exemplary, and in which the better and the worse are not always supernaturally distinguished. And this history is not that of mankind at large, or of any ordinary portion of mankind, but principally and professedly that of a peculiar people—of a people subjected to a special discipline for a special purpose; not simply a people favoured with more of that kind of culture which would be equally applicable to all peoples, but with a scheme of polity and a mode of providential interposition which was essentially inapplicable to the whole race of man. It is true that the earliest Scriptures do illustrate the infancy of the race more than all other Scriptures whatever, while they are engaged with their own special purpose: but it is also true that as they proceed they become more and more limited in their human interest, save as they intensify by contracting our vision and fixing it on the Divine plan of introducing a Messiah for mankind, of whose history and teaching the latest Scriptures are the record and the exposition. But even these later Scriptures consist rather of outlines of that history, and of specimens of the nature of that teaching, than of an unfolding and application of the principles and precepts of the New Dispensation in their most complete and catholic form.

And therefore in connection with, and in consequence of, this special character of Revelation, it ought to be very distinctly borne in mind that a large portion of Revelation must be for us but indirect. There is but very little indeed that is addressed to all men equally. The knowledge of

GOD'S will that comes to us through written Revelations is for the most part only inferential: it has to be extracted by us out of a mass of historical as well as expressly didactic documents: and none of it has been addressed primarily to ourselves, or to the generation in which we live; nor is the existence of such a social and intellectual condition as that in which we live ever directly contemplated or referred to in the great majority of the teachings of the Old and New Testament. Not only is Revelation for the most part specially adapted and addressed to peoples and generations very far removed from us—so far removed as to require from us a very considerable exercise of Imagination before we can understand their position—but it is absolutely necessary that we should in most instances detach and disengage it from its circumstances before we can make it either intelligible or applicable in our own case.

Unquestionably both the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures do contain Divine communications of a form the most general and of a character the most direct—Revelations of the essentials of Deity and of Humanity which are of perpetual and universal significance. And wherever these occur they may and must be considered as the most solemn and precious of all the contents of the Bible. But even of these it should be specially noted that they are for the most part progressive. The Bible contains, in fact, a series as well as a collection of Revelations: a series of which the earliest terms are the least, and which but very gradually, and not quite uniformly, rises to its height, and only after long centuries reaches its final terms in Him who was Himself the highest Revelation which man can be conceived capable of receiving in the flesh.

That there is such a progression in the Revelation of truth and duty in the Bible must be obvious at once to any one who considers the gradual manner in which those two greatest of all ideas—GOD and Immortality—are disclosed in it, and how that great duty of loving all men as ourselves and considering every man as our brother, was never at all insisted on under the older dispensations. Putting aside for the present any consideration of this latter point as one fundamently involved in the very texture of the constitution of the peculiar people, we cannot but observe how limited were the Revelations which GOD is represented as making of Himself in the earliest Scriptures. The first Revelation indeed of GOD is that of Creator of the heavens and the earth, and of man: and then we have that which exhibits Him as the moral Governor of the primeval few and the fearful Judge of the whole earth, but nowhere at first have we more than a faint outline and a few elements of that great idea which His later Revelations have enabled us to embrace. The first Revelation of Himself in that character which we have come now to consider as the highest and most influential on the heart of man was confined to an individual, a family, a tribe: always in the earliest records He is represented as standing in such a relation only to a few, never anywhere as being the common Father of all men equally. In the Law of Moses His characteristic Revelation of Himself is as a Lawgiver: in the earliest historical books the prominent idea of GOD is that of the Lord of Hosts—the GOD of the Jews only, and not of the Gentiles. In the Psalms we find the earlier representations frequently superseded by more adequate ones, though in some of these the most limited would seem to reappear:

while in the Prophets the more nearly they approach to the times of the Messiah, there is a growing approximation to that idea which was first and fully revealed only by Him. But in no part of the older Scriptures have we any Revelation of GOD under that form which holds such prominence in the creed of Christendom, or any which has not always led the Jew to believe that such an idea was inconsistent with the fundamental teaching of his Scriptures.

And so too with regard to the great doctrine of individual immortality. Glimpses of this doctrine were, it may be, granted to special persons—to Abraham and Moses and David, to Isaiah and Ezekiel and Daniel, for instances: but in whatsoever measure such knowledge was vouchsafed to such as these, and as extending to themselves and some small portion of mankind, it never seems to have been prominently revealed or impressively inculcated, so far as the great body of the subjects of Revelation are concerned. It had no sanction in Jewish Law, and it had no symbol in Jewish worship. It never was appealed to as any motive to exertion, nor upheld as any comfort in trouble. It never anywhere is recognised as a fundamental article of faith, or has any of that prominence given to it which we find in the Christian Scriptures. Indeed in the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures there is less said about a future life than there is in the small volume of the Apocrypha, and less even than there is in the records of many heathen nations, and in the remains of several heathen writers.

IV.

They are based on the principle of accommodation.

And not only is there Progression in the Revelations of the Bible but also Accommodation. By Accommodation is meant not merely the use of sensible images and purely human expressions in the conveyance of spiritual ideas, or of types and symbols, and parables and allegories, in the exhibition or explanation of invisible realities; but more than this, namely, the temporary permission and sanction of existing modes of thought and feeling with regard to religious truth and duty which were not merely inadequate but partially untrue, and which it was intended subsequently to supersede by fuller Revelations. The earlier anthropomorphic representations of Deity are of this kind: and indeed throughout the whole Law of Moses GOD is spoken of in terms which require a translation into other language with which the later Revelations have furnished us before we can heartily accept them as Divine. It is only indeed on this principle of accommodation that we can learn willingly to associate some portion of the Hebrew Scriptures with the Revelations of the Gospel of CHRIST.

And when we turn from the region of Truth to that of Morality we find this assumption still more necessary. We find the polygamy of the patriarchs and of David and of Solomon, and the warrior spirit of the Judges, and many acts of treachery and of cruelty from Jael to Jehu, sanctioned rather than rebuked by prophetic communications. And throughout the whole of the Mosaic teaching there is a constant tendency to put the observance of rites and ceremonies on the same level with the performance of moral duties and the cultivation of spiritual dispositions:

and so ungraduated an estimate of duty as this bears on the face of it irresistible evidence that in the degree that it was a Divine Revelation it could be also but a temporary accommodation.

Indeed what was Judaism itself—as a whole and in all its parts—but a great system of accommodation—a signal instance of the special adaptation of perfect wisdom to the imperfection of its disciples? The selection of one people—a people of slaves—from among many others, and the educating them so as to be always a peculiar people—a people not intended ever to exhibit a normal condition for all peoples, but only a condition introductory to something more perfect which might belong to all others but could not belong to them—and all this for a period of fifteen centuries—what is this but an indisputable concession to human infirmity? And this people not being more influenced for good when they were influenced so much, what is this, too, but the same? And then if we consider the Law of Moses in detail, how can we but be impressed conclusively with this great fact of accommodation? When we see that much of his characteristic teaching was in accordance with his Egyptian learning, and that many of the statutes and ordinances which he gave his people derive their chief significance from their reference to Egyptian rites and institutions. And surely this influence of heathen modes of religious thought and feeling on the Law which is called the Law of the LORD as well as the Law of Moses, is a most remarkable and conclusive instance of that accommodation which is elsewhere, almost everywhere, to be traced in the Revelations of the Bible. Doubtless this Egyptian influence in the Mosaic economy has been largely over-rated, and

was most especially so when first noticed, but still the most scrupulously just estimate of that influence leaves an amount of it which only an unscrupulously unjust criticism can either ignore or contradict.

V.

The education of man is progressive.

Indeed if man is to be dealt with in any communication from GOD by any process which shall not subvert his essential humanity, it is difficult to conceive how a Revelation commencing at an early period of his history, and extending over ages, should be otherwise than one of Progression and Accommodation. No assertion of analogy can be truer than that which is often said to exist between the childhood of the race and of the individual, and of growth in both. And if this be so, how can it be otherwise than that the spiritual education of both should proceed on the same principles? And in such case must we not expect to find in the earliest revelations of the Divine nature and of human duty the same kind of condescending adaptations to infantine incapacity which we know to be indispensable in our own individual experience? The fact is, that in all communication of knowledge, the mind of the recipient must be as much considered as the truth which is to be taught. In order to secure the greatest power of vision the light must be accommodated to the eye. The brightest light will not necessarily enable every man to see the best. Adaptation to the organ is a greater requisite in the medium of vision than intrinsic brightness. Thus if Revelation be considered as spiritual light, and man be considered as in a good measure spiritually blind,

it could hardly be wisely otherwise than that the transition from blindness to sight and from darkness to light should be gradual. And consider well what the problem (if it may be so said with reverence) of a gradual Revelation must ever be—how Progression must involve Accommodation. To make a communication of truth and duty which shall satisfy the highest culture of any age, and shall at the same time be intelligible to the rudest ages, it must of necessity be one which shall be universal and unchangeable only in its spirit, and not in its form. It is scarcely possible —at least it is scarcely conceivable by us—that it should be made in so general and inflexible a form as that it should never be interfered with in the process of the ages by that universal change and development which uninterruptedly goes on in everything elsewhere with which man is conversant and concerned. Such an utterance of truth would, as far as we can see or judge by any analogies of nature or of history, be out of keeping with our present condition in the flesh, and is certainly contrary to any experience which we have hitherto had.

Truly to some minds the process of a gradual and growing Revelation seems no matter of wonder or apology, but rather to be so reasonable and so wise as to make the fact that the Bible recognises and exhibits it a stronger evidence to them of its being the book of GOD than the sum of all the details of its historical testimonials. The laws of nature and of spirit seem thus to be in harmony. The earth of herself brings forth first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear; and to those who meditate on this law for long, and compare it with what they feel within themselves and perceive everywhere around

them, there will appear a peculiar fitness in its being recognised and acted upon in any system of supernatural education. And man's progressive education, is not this one of the chief aims of his position on earth? Does not the assumption of this justify itself by interpreting many difficulties otherwise insoluble? And though at first sight it may not accord with the undisciplined instincts of some to associate the tolerance of imperfection in connection with the instrumentality of perfection, yet if we concede much to this immaturity of apprehension, we do away with one of the most forcible evidences of the Divinity of the Bible that can be afforded to many; and for the sake of gaining or giving a proof of more immediate application, we are sacrificing evidence which though it may be but slowly appreciated, yet the more it is investigated will manifest itself every way the more amply.

And really no objection to this scheme of gradual and imperfect Revelation can be of more force than that which asks, Why is this universe one of degree? Why are not all things created in their most perfect forms? And why are not only the most perfect things created? Why growth of any kind anywhere? Or why did indefinite ages pass away before man was created, and why some thousands of years after this, before he was redeemed? Verily what men count slackness seems to be an essential condition of all manifestations of the Divine in the forms of time and space. And how can we conceive of any Revelation of the infinite which shall not be for ever imperfect to the finite? How of any communication of the spiritual that can be made to men on earth as otherwise than less full and clear than that which shall be made to those who are free from

the burden of the flesh? Nay, what can we conceive even of the future life of the redeemed, but as of an eternal succession of progressive Revelations—a continually expanding development of the possible manifestations of Godhead?

And if this is the case with the Revelation of truth, so is it, and ought it to be, also with the Revelation of duty. The conscience, as well as the intellect, of man is ever under a process of education and of growth, and the commands of duty, to be either just or effective, must be proportioned to the moral condition of their subjects. The conscience of man is no invariable and definite endowment, the same in all men everywhere and always: it varies as much in different stages of man's social progress as it does in all the interval which lies between the first timid instincts of the untaught savage, and the large and prompt susceptibilities of the maturest Christian. A wide experience of good and evil is necessary for the due development of the moral judgments equally of a nation and an individual: and the father who should impose the obligations of manhood upon a yet lisping son, or the lawgiver who should enforce the prescripts of a high civilisation upon a people whom he was only for the first time attempting to reclaim from barbarism, would be as unjust as he would be unwise.

Now the Hebrews at the time of the delivering of their Law were as low in mental and moral condition as any people probably ever were who have been organised suddenly into national life. For two centuries and more they had been slaves—Egyptian slaves—and of such inveterate habits of idolatry that amidst the very thunderings and lightnings of Sinai they made a calf to worship it for a

god. For such a people then a law enjoining all that ought to be done by man, and forbidding all that ought not, would have been a burden far too heavy for them to bear: and accommodated and imperfect as it was, it remained for a thousand years, in respect of the merely elementary prohibition of image worship, a law too high for them to obey, or perhaps even to understand. For it would seem that for long centuries, and under the most pious of their rulers, a certain modified idolatry was publicly tolerated, and that never until their captivity did they cease to conceive of the Unity of GOD as only relating to the Lord their GOD, or to believe in the real existence of other gods for other nations, though inferior and subject to their own supreme JEHOVAH.

And even the highest Revelation ever given on earth did not profess to undertake to promulgate all possible truth and duty, or to correct all the wrong opinions and practices which existed, or might exist, among mankind. There are several social evils, some individual sins, which are not rebuked even in the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour JESUS CHRIST: and there are many private and public virtues which are not exhibited or enforced. Even the Christian teaching apparently proposed only to illuminate for all men their most important relations and duties by the enunciation of germinant ideas and principles, and then to allow a gradually clearer perception of these, and obedience to them, to work out the necessarily consequent rules for the improvement of the moral and intellectual habits of the race.

But then if these things be admitted—if Revelation be thus indirect and progressive and accommodative, and

thus some portions of it may become superseded by others, or be only incidentally and inferentially instructive—let it be well understood that it by no means follows that any portion has become wholly useless or unprofitable. By no means: those portions which in their primary significance and direct obligation have become obsolete for us, do not lose all their worth. The use of them only changes, it does not cease. The spiritual mind which judges all things, even the deep things of GOD, discerns and separates between the things which differ in excellence, and applies to new uses those things which have lost their old: it makes that which was once food for the understanding now food for the heart, and that which once was looked upon as the highest privilege which might be hoped for, material to enkindle thanksgiving that we have been so prodigally blessed as that we may consider it among the things which we have to leave behind in our striving after the prize of our high calling. In no other way, indeed, could we deal rationally or reverently with a progressive Revelation. For to consider a series of educational processes as in all its terms of precisely the same value—to give every part of a large system, historically developed, an equal absolute worth—to ascribe the same reverence to the acts of Joshua and the acts of the Apostles, or to the sayings of a Solomon and of a John—would be to produce a confusion among all our thoughts and feelings which must assuredly negative or neutralise some of the very finest lessons which Revelation was designed to furnish. And surely as we do not expect the full-grown man to revert to the lessons of his childhood for expositions or limitations of communications made to his maturer age, so neither ought

we to expect the disciple of JESUS to be referred from His teachings to the lessons of Moses, nor the inheritor of thirty centuries and more of specially Divine culture to be ruled by the instructions of even the most spiritual of the Patriarchs.

VI.

The Record of Revelation not necessarily infallible.

Such modifications of the absolute character of Revelation are introduced by a consideration of the imperfection of the recipients of it: there are others as considerable which are the consequence of the imperfection of the agents and the instruments of it. The employment of the human mind as the agent, and of human language and writing as the instruments, this necessarily involves a measure of fallibility in the record of the Revelation. It ought indeed to be distinctly borne in mind that there is no necessary, or even reasonable, connection between a man's being the subject of a special Divine communication and his subsequent universal infallibility: nor can we have the assurance of such infallibility unless we could ensure not only the presence of the Divine Spirit in the man, but also the absence of everything else. Indeed carry as high as we can the conception of Divine influence acting on the human mind, short of the conversion of mind into mechanism, yet we cannot get rid of the possibility of imperfection. In such case the spirit infused cannot but be conceived as mingling with the spirit existing in him who shall utter its Divine dictates under the forms of human expression. The Divine cannot be separated altogether from the human where the essentials of both

are so much akin, and the nature of the one is, in some sense, the image of the other. The only case in which we can conceive of truth being uttered purely is in the case of Him who was the truth—its author and its essence: but confessedly He spake as man never spake; and we now are not the auditors, but the mere readers of His words. And this is a difference which is so important as to reduce the difference between this case (a case otherwise without a parallel) and the other cases very considerably. For we find the words of our Lord on the same occasions often repeated by the different evangelists with circumstantial variations: and this fact cannot but suggest to us that to whatever extent Divine influence may have been exerted on the minds of the reporters of His words, it did not extend to the minutely verbal accuracy of their records. And surely this being so, we may justly suppose that if such accuracy was not deemed necessary in the case of the record of the sayings of Him who has given us the highest of all revelations of the mind of GOD, it could scarcely be deemed so in any more partial communications.

Indeed if we consider that the persons who were the most under Divine influence of any who have ever been used to convey GOD'S will to man, have variously reflected the mind of Him who equally taught them all, we cannot but see that our Lord did not use His Apostles as mere mechanical conveyances of truth. It would seem indisputable that what their Master infused into their minds mingled with what it met there, and was reproduced with some of their peculiarities of thought and feeling, though not so tinged with earthly elements as that its essential

celestial qualities were materially impaired. Nothing can be more obvious than that each of those who have had a share in the composition of the New Testament has a strongly marked individuality in his methods of presenting the truths he records, and all their characters as traceable in their histories are distinctly traceable in their writings. And the example of Apostolic history also teaches us that under the highest privileges and the most special aids, the sincerest minds came only gradually to a full perception of the truth as it was in CHRIST: and that when they had arrived at their maturest estate, they found it impossible to secure their best converts from considerable errors, or to make them intelligent participants of much of that high wisdom which they were longing to impart. And if this be the case with Christian apostles, how much more so may we presume it to have been the case with their predecessors under a less privileged dispensation? In no case have we any proof, or even appearance, of truth having been as supernaturally conveyed by any men to their fellows as it has been conveyed by the Spirit of GOD to themselves.

VII.

Imperfection of all written language.

And then we must consider the fact that Revelation has been made in the common spoken dialects of men, not in any hieroglyphics, or specially created symbols. Now human thought is always superior to its expression, and language is most imperfect when feeling is most profound. No spoken language has yet been found exact enough to express the highest generalisations, or the subtlest processes of the intellect: but men have been obliged to invest

symbolical languages when they have wished to express the ideas of the pure intellect precisely—languages which though definite are arbitrary, and though pure are not popular. But though for the expression of ordinary practical duties and natural feelings, common language is sufficient, and symbolical language may be made sufficient for the expression of the processes of the pure intellect, yet no vernacular or symbolical language has ever yet been found which has adequately interpreted the deepest feelings and aspirations and intuitions of the soul; and therefore much less may we expect that such language would be sufficient to express those supernatural heights and depths of thought and feeling which are characteristic of a Revelation from heaven.

And if it should be demanded why human language was not purified before it was employed for such high and holy uses, it is only asking why the conditions of man's existence were not reversed before he was redeemed, rather than Redemption itself made to be the means of the gradual improvement of these conditions. And to all such questions as these a reverent silence is the only fitting reply; our duty being simply to observe what GOD has been pleased to do, and to conform our conceptions to this. And all such observation leads us to the conclusion that GOD has from the first trace of His dealings with man limited Himself to the condition of working out human Redemption only through the gradual removal of human imperfections by human instrumentality, and according to certain laws of a progressive Development and a condescending Accommodation.

And to these considerations, and others of a like kind, connected with the necessary imperfections of human lan-

guage, ought to be added others respecting the consequences of our profession of only a written Revelation. This peculiarity of our having to derive our knowledge of GOD's will and purposes from the mere record of a Revelation, and not from any Revelation either made directly to ourselves, or infallibly transmitted by some perpetual living oracle, involves many other peculiarities which ought to be carefully attended to if we would receive accurate impressions concerning the degree of Divinity which there is in the pages of the Bible. For be it remembered that a record of a Revelation may be very different from the original Revelation itself. That a Revelation should be a written one is not either a necessary, or even a simple, condition or conception. The first Revelations for some thousand years of the world's history, it may be, were not written, and that Art which is the only one which has hitherto proved effectual for accurately preserving, as well as extensively promulgating, varied knowledge, was not permitted to man's discovery until these latest ages. But Revelations when committed to writing, and to writing only, must in process of time partake of the imperfections peculiar to this characteristically human mode of expression. The materials are perishable, and the scribes are both changeable and fallible; and unless there be a series of admitted miracles for their preservation from errors and decay from age to age, it is contradictory to all experience to believe that any documents can be transmitted for a thousand years exactly as they were composed at first. When Revelation therefore was committed to a book, it became subject to the conditions of imperfection belonging to all books as such. And we find that the Bible as a book, or rather as a collection of books, has a history

of its own—the most remarkable and complex of all similar histories—and in this history we are able to trace continually the effects of external and purely human influences, without any kind of miraculous counteraction being at the same time discernible.

VIII.

Revelation invariable in substance—variable in form.

These considerations alone, and in their most general form, if duly weighed, would lead us to the conviction that the Divine influence which has been exerted on the composition of our present Holy Scriptures has been extended indubitably only to the spirit and the substance of Revelation, and but doubtfully to the letter and the detail of its records: and even further suggest to us that the Bible, however divine as a testimony, may be always human as a literature, marked everywhere by the influences of the contemporary age, and universal and everlasting and invariable only in its principles, and in its ideas, and its aims.

But there are also other facts, lying very near the surface too, though often strangely overlooked or disregarded, which tend very much to strengthen and extend this conviction. A few of such facts are these.

The books of Scripture have all the same external appearances, both in their history and present condition, that other ancient books have. There are just the same kind of literal imperfections in them that there are in all others. They appear to have been subject to exactly the same kind of deteriorating influences in their transmission which have acted upon others; and if the degree of this influence has not been so great, yet the difference is not such as to require,

or even to admit, the supposition of a special Divine interference to account for it. As there is no copy of any book in a dead language which is the same as its author's autograph, and none which probably preserves everywhere his sense unchanged, so is this the case with every one of the books of the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures. There have been examined more than a thousand manuscripts of the Hebrew Scriptures, and more than half that number of the Christian : and there have been found to exist many tens of thousands of verbal variations between them : and in very many cases it is not possible to determine certainly the original reading : so that the printed copies of the Bible (in the original language) most generally in use, and from which the most popular translations have been made, are not the literal transcript of any one manuscript, but only a conjectural composition out of many. Our present received text has been a growth—improved from many and various sources, and differing in many thousand words from other texts which have been received of old.

But at the same time it is here said, and from time to time, it may be, it shall be repeated, that all the variations and imperfections which have ever been pointed out in the text of Scripture, amount to nothing considerable so far as the essence of Revelation is concerned, though they do amount to something considerable so far as the nature of the vehicle of the Revelation is concerned. As regards the understanding of the characteristic doctrines and duties of the Jewish and Christian religions—but as regards this only —it makes the least possible difference whether we take the very worst or very best copies of the Bible now in existence : a fact which should be a relief to all earnest and

spiritual inquirers, though it may not be satisfactory to the mere theorist or formalist. All the collations of the Holy Scriptures, both of the Old and New Testaments, show conclusively that there is no considerable corruption of the great body of the text, though there are abounding infirmities in various portions of its surface. And this fact at once strengthens the great truth of there being a Divine Life in the mass, while it opposes the notion of there being any absolute incorruptibility in the material.

Other facts of this kind there are, arising not only from the successive transmission, but also from the original composition of the Bible.

With regard to the Old Testament, the names of the writers of many of the books are unknown, and the dates of their composition, save within large limits : and by what authority, or at what period, they were incorporated into a sacred canon, is also unknown. And generally it may be said with regard to a large portion of the Jewish Scriptures, that if viewed by themselves, and apart from the traditional claims which have been made for them, they would not suggest, must less require, the belief that they were documents wholly Divine.

And again : There are irreconcilable differences of historic detail between one book and another of the Hebrew Scriptures.

And again : It is obvious that many of the books could have been composed only many hundreds of years after the events that they relate, and that even some of the earlier must have been altered or added to since they were written, inasmuch as they contain references to events of much later history. Indeed the whole of the Old Testament

Scripture has the appearance of having been edited by some unknown hand, and in being so edited, of having been altered—to no great extent, it may be, yet to an extent which we cannot define.

And with regard to the New Testament, these are facts which demand careful consideration: That the writings which constitute its canon have been collected into one volume by no authority known to be especially Divine, or professing to be so: That some of the books do not claim to have been composed by Divine dictation; and others confessedly have been composed by persons whom we do not know to have had any Divine commission or qualification for delivering infallible truth: That we do not know certainly who were the authors of some of them: That there are indisputable inaccuracies and discrepancies in some of them.

A patient consideration of such facts as these will probably lead most to the conclusion that whatever may have been the extent of Divine interposition in the composition of the sacred Scriptures, it has not been such as to make them certainly such a record of Divine utterances as to be throughout verbally and literally true. We shall the rather be led to believe that the special influence of GOD has been exerted on the minds of their writers only in such measure as to enable them to reveal so much of His will and purposes as He would have known from time to time as a rule of faith and duty, directly to those of old time, indirectly to those of all time—with clearness and precision enough to guide the immediate recipients of the Revelation to higher degrees of moral and spiritual life than they had before attained to, and with only such obscurity and inaccuracy as

need be no stumbling block to those who should live under the light of subsequent Revelations. This influence we may believe to have extended sometimes to the very words of the Revelation, but far more often only to the substance of it: so that most generally where the message is Divine the language of it is human: and we may believe that almost all the intimations of the Spirit of GOD to the spirit of men, have not been reproduced to us in the form in which they were made to them, but have been, as it were, translated from one mode into another, in their passage through the minds of the recipients.

Thus while whatever in the Bible professes to be pure Revelation, and to be transferred to us as it has been received from above, is to be received as such, whatever does not claim to be such, we need receive only as a translation of the Divine: and while it is necessary to believe that distinct Oracles of GOD are contained in the Law and the Prophets, the Evangelists and Apostles, it is not necessary to believe that the connecting links—the framing and setting—of these Revelations are all of the same quality as the Revelations themselves. Even in the case of those who have received the Spirit of GOD in the largest measure—the Apostles of CHRIST—and who were so exclusively ordained and qualified by Him to be the promulgators of His Gospel to all men of all times as to be entitled to the highest reverence which it is lawful to ascribe to any who have the Spirit but by measure—it may not be necessary to believe that either the mode or the instrument by which they communicated their Revelations to others was precisely as perfect as that by which they were communicated to themselves. It is necessary to believe that an apostle was adequately

instructed in all things which he undertook to teach, but it may not be necessary to believe that in his mode of teaching any of his particular disciples he was otherwise influenced than as a mature Christian father may be in teaching his infant child. It is necessary to believe that he was divinely guided in all his chief aims and principles, and entirely imbued with the love and spirit of his Master and of his work, but it may not be necessary to believe that he was equally guided in all his modes of argument and illustration in his teaching, nor so controlled in whatever he wrote as to be universally infallible in all unspiritual minutiæ.

Indeed as by far the largest portions of Holy Scripture are history rather than law, and more biography than precept, the idea of Revelation must of necessity be modified considerably for these. Of these portions it may suffice to believe, that the great historic outline, both in its substance and in its expression, is conveyed to us faithfully as it appeared to minds the most divinely influenced of their age: and not only this, but that Scripture as it is, with its selection of facts and moral judgments of them, has been ordained of GOD to be written thus rather than otherwise, because on the whole the instruction of men in righteousness would be thus best provided for. But while the history of the Bible is thus considered essentially authentic and providentially ordered, it may also be considered as incidentallly inaccurate and often incomplete: and that while the moral and spiritual welfare of all generations has been consulted, the purely human and tempered elements of the documents have been allowed to be governed by only ordinary laws.

IX.

If it should be thought that this is not an adequate conception of the extent of the Divine interposition which has taken place in the composition of the Scriptures, it must be said, that to define it more accurately does not seem reconcilable with facts, or consistent with the small knowledge we possess either of the operations of the Divine or the capacities of the human. But at the same time it may be here emphatically declared once for all, that all such difficulty or inadequacy of definition as may be manifested in this book arises from no desire to limit the extent of Divine influence on the mind of man, but from the very contrary conviction of that influence being indefinite from its greatness. The preliminary and pervading assumption of these pages, and of the writer's view of the Church of GOD, is that there is, and ever has been, a constant commerce between the Spirit of GOD and the spirits of men, and that the idea of Divine influence is so much in accordance with the highest aspirations of man, and so inseparable from any idea of a Providence over the affairs of men, that it must lie at the base of all speculation that can hope to deal intelligently with any of the great problems of human history and human destiny.

Divine communications not confined to past ages.

Consider well that in some sense all men live and move and have their being in GOD: that GOD is present and active in all spirit as well as in all space; that we cannot say, and dare not conjecture, where GOD is not; that there is a certain Divine influence omnipresent in all souls—a Word of GOD always very nigh to every man, even in his heart: and therefore when we ponder well what we mean

by these things, how can we but believe that always and largely, and now as ever, a Divine effluence and influence must be operating in that great realm of human spirit which constitutes more especially the kingdom of GOD on earth? And how distinguish between spiritual influences which may differ in degree only and not in kind? How need an intuition of truth differ in kind from a Revelation of it? And if any thought be spontaneous, how is it certainly not miraculous? Every mind accustomed to self-contemplation must be frequently conscious of there arising within it thoughts which are unexpected and unaccountable, but at the same time most rational and most moral: and these surely seem to assert that the intellect, as well as the will, has a certain portion of life in itself. The origin of all thought, as of all birth, is mysterious, and no philosophy can in all cases suffice to discern between what is spontaneous and what is supernatural. Nay, even the testimony of the best men morally as to the immediate origin of their thoughts and feelings may conceivably not be trustworthy. If a man bear witness of himself in such case his witness may not be true, though he himself may be most truthful. There is surely a state of mind real and frequent, in which thought seems in a process of formation —using instruments of its own inexplicable and unutterable —of which language is only the subsequent translation—a state too dim indeed for speculation, but one exhibited equally in the earliest emotions of the infant's spirit and in the loftiest meditations of the wise. And will not every religious soul be capable of conceiving that in the noblest spirits of our race there may have been seasons when communion with GOD has become a consciousness of His

indwelling: when love of Him has become as rest in Him, and faith as sight: when the sympathy between the individual soul and the soul of all has become so complete that there seemed no distinguishable life, but GOD has dwelt in it, and it in GOD! And if this be so, will not such an one be able to understand that in such a high hour of religious visitation and in this ethereal region—in some dream of the intellect and slumber of the will—when the soul knows not whether it is unclothed or only clothed upon—immortality seeming begun but mortality not wholly swallowed up—at some such season as this, it may be, the Divine Spirit may mingle with the human, and mingling overmaster it? But—the wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth.

X.

The Unity of the Bible.

Most important is it for the student of Scripture that he should have his mind open to some such considerations as these: for he who sets out with the assumption that the Bible is throughout a Revelation of pure truth, and nothing else, will assuredly in the course of his studies, if they be long continued, have much either gradually or suddenly to surrender, and all the multiplied mortifications which usually attend an important erroneous element in a complicated argument. An honest, earnest searcher of the Scriptures commencing his investigations with this prepossession cannot be long before he will find many things in his search which he had not anticipated, and will encounter difficulties of which an uneducated or superficial

reader will not be aware, and which even he may not be able, when they are pointed out to him, fully to comprehend. To such an one there is always much of Scripture which is at best a blank to him, and he is consequently as ignorant of the difficulties as he is of the profitableness of what is there written for his learning. But one whose professed object is to search below the surface, and to allow nothing which may be precious there to escape him, will assuredly have his faith troubled as well as cherished, and strengthened only by exercise and by struggle. His only safety and wisdom he will then find to be in laying his mind as completely open as he can to the impressions which the Scriptures themselves may produce upon him, and though not dispossessing himself of any reverence which he may have been taught to bring to the study of them, yet in holding all theoretical traditions concerning the modes of the Divine operations so loosely that they may adapt themselves to every fact, and exclude none.

For surely he who brings with him the notion that the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures contain a Divine utterance, or presuppose even a Divine influence, in every sentence, if not in every word and letter, binds upon himself a burden which those Scriptures do not call upon him to bear: and therefore being thus unnecessarily encumbered and oppressed, will probably stumble at obstacles which freer limbs and a lighter tread will find it easy to overstep or to remove. If such an one is truly conscientious in his researches, he cannot but find that uncertainty rests often where he had thought that all had been clear and conclusive, and that there really do appear

inaccuracies of detail where he had presumed that all had been circumstantially infallible: and therefore there must come a collision between his prepossessions and his acquisitions which it is but wise, if he can, to mitigate by anticipating.

And it will also most probably be the case that if he comes to the study of the Bible with the deep but simple belief that it is a gift from GOD of indefinite, though of unspeakable, grace: that it contains, rather than consists of special Revelations: that the spiritual nourishment which it offers has to be sought with the same diligence, and to be applied with the same discretion, as the provisions for man's life in material nature; and that emphatically Divine though it be essentially, and providentially constructed as a whole, it may be expected to be nevertheless in many of its parts but of earthly material and of human aspect—then his faith in the Divine wisdom which has presided over its composition will rather tend continually to increase than to diminish, inasmuch as his continued communion with the Divine Spirit which obviously and indubitably dwells in large portions of it, will so strengthen and purify his spiritual vision as to enable him to recognise a providential adaptation, in other portions where many find only a contradiction to their understanding or a trial for their faith. At least as far as some assertions and facts which disturb the minds of many are concerned, he will find that they are true only in a sense and to an extent in which it would be a continual miracle if they were not so, and will gain an intelligent conviction that there is no single error in Holy Scripture which need affect the essential well-being of his own spiritual nature, but that rather the sum of all its

infirmities and imperfections is less in proportion to its holy truths than the chaff is to the wheat in any harvest—yea, is even only as the small dust of the balance compared with the greatest weight which that balance will weigh.

By such considerations too it is, and by such it may be alone, that we are enabled cheerfully and consistently to combine both the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures into one canonical volume of truth and duty. This has ever been felt in all ages as an exceeding difficulty, and scarcely any one requirement has been the cause of so much error and unbelief as the demand that the Old and New Testaments should be received as alike Divine. And probably no thoughtful student of the Bible has always been free from this difficulty: none at least has failed to perceive that there is often such a discrepancy of character in some of the earlier asserted Revelations when compared with the spirit of the Christian Scriptures, that it requires a constraint upon natural impulse to permit their incorporation into the same code of spiritual law. Every one must probably feel that there are passages in the Old Testament which could not be transferred to the New without appearing wholly out of harmony even with its letter, and that there are multiplied declarations and acts and characters approved in the one, which would be altogether disallowed by the other. There is no need to particularise, and formally to contrast the one with the other—instances will arise at will—it shall only be said that in our own days the difficulty is yet felt to press as hardly as ever of old, and that therefore it is but a work of charity to relax the claim of the universal equal obligation of the letter of all the

Scripture, and to proclaim a more flexible rule of judgment, if on independent grounds we think we legitimately may.

And the facts and inferences above stated being fairly weighed, we do seem at once to gain some principles of interpretation which lessen this fearful difficulty. Considering that the Divine communications from the very first have been progressive and accommodative—special adaptations to the circumstances and infirmities of those to whom they were immediately addressed—we derive from this the important principle, that these communications are for us but partial and indirect Revelation: obligatory and instructive by inference and analogy rather than positively, and only in so far as we are under the like circumstances with those to whom they were originally vouchsafed. The mere fact of a presentation of Deity or a command of duty being given to them of old time, is by no means conclusive proof that the same would have been given to us now, or that we should be justified in moulding our characters or our conduct in conformity with it in these latter days, when so many old things have been abolished, and so many other things have been made new.

The Hebrew Revelation, it must be repeated, was not one for all mankind any more than it was one to all mankind. It was made up of various Revelations, given under different circumstances, and having direct and intimate relation to these circumstances, and to a complicated abnormal constitution so unlike anything of which we have experience that it requires a high effort of historic imagination approximately to estimate either the similarity or the difference. In order in fact to interpret aright such

communications, we must consider the Bible as a whole having a symmetry, which it behoves us never to impair: and in detaching any part of it for any other purpose than that for which it was primarily given, we must take heed to do no violence to the proportion of that with which it is immediately connected. Not only therefore must the special circumstances under which an assertion or a precept is laid down in the Bible be carefully studied, and the letter of such assertion or precept be interpreted in the light of these, but also no large inference must be drawn from the mere words of Scripture without a consideration of the term of the progression in which it is, and a modification of its positive significance which shall bring it into accordance with the characteristic spirit of the latest Revelation. When a passage, for instance, meets us from the older Scriptures which involves an idea of GOD, or a standard of duty, we must, before intrepreting or applying it, above all things first consider its date, and deduce its universal signifiance by deducting all the accidents of time and place, and retaining only that which will expand indefinitely. And if we find, as we often shall do, views of GOD which are most frequent in the earlier Scriptures less and less frequent in the later, and other views come into existence at first but dimly, but as time goes on become increasingly more prominent, only giving way to still brighter lights, then we not only may but must believe that this last light is that by the help of which we ought to work, and in the warmth of which we ought to live. Verily we who have had so very much brought to light for us through JESUS CHRIST, and so much done, at such a price, to put us into the position of full-grown men—to exalt us from the

old estate of servants into that of children, and very friends—not only may but ought to put away the thoughts of GOD which were given only to those who, while they had neither the docility nor the innocence of childhood, had all its ignorance and all its infirmity.

XI.

Relation between the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.

In order to exhibit more clearly the nature of the principles necessary for the enlightened interpretation of the whole Bible, and also to prevent any misconception concerning the degree of sacredness attached in these pages to the older Scriptures, it may be well to state here distinctly the relation which it is supposed exists between the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures. Unquestionably then the elder Scriptures are a divinely provided introduction to the new. In them we see, providentially recorded, the outlines of the process by which it has pleased GOD to prepare and educate man for that ultimate restoration to His image, and reunion with Himself, which He has reserved for a portion of our race through CHRIST. And as this process was founded upon the election and peculiar training of a single people, the Old Testament contains the record of the idea according to which this people was moulded, and its historic manifestations: and of that special symbolic and suggestive method of instruction and of discipline by which this people was made a prophetic depository of the full and final Revelation which was to come through a Messiah to spring from them. The Old Testament therefore throughout is prophetic and symbolic of the Revelations of the New, and derives its worth for us

not so much from itself, as from its relation to that to which it was introductory and preparatory.

The Hebrew Scriptures therefore have a different value for us from that which they must have had for those to whom they were first given, inasmuch as they were for them the highest Revelation known, and the only means of understanding the purposes of GOD with regard to the redemption of man, while for us they do not reveal a single attribute or purpose of Deity, or a single commandment of duty, which we have not more fully revealed in our own Scriptures, and omit many truths which are fundamental and characteristic doctrines of the gospel, and which give a new aspect to the whole history and destiny of man. Though the relation therefore of the Old Testament to the New must always be recognised by us as close and inseparable, it ought at the same time to be distinctly understood to be that of type to antitype, of porch to temple, of dawn to day. To us the Hebrew Scriptures are chiefly illustrative of our own, making us understand how GOD has been from man's first creation in constant intercourse with him : that no part of the long history of our race which precedes us has been destitute of divine teachings and consolations : and that we are the latest links of a long chain, and not isolated instances of GOD's providential trainings. The Old Testament is for mankind at large a Divine first lesson book : a series of accommodated instructions linking themselves on to a low stage of moral and mental life, and leading men on from that to a higher by degrees and gently : a record suitable throughout to those for whom it was first recorded, and of a structure and a material consistent with the dispensation

itself to which it ministered. The spirit which pervaded that dispensation was of the same kind indeed as that of which the New displays the highest type, but it was often of so low a degree of it as to seem its opposite, and therefore though the two Testaments may justly be considered as organically connected into one living whole, yet the elements of the Old Testament must ever be accounted as the less honourable members of that body, and those of the New the head and heart of all. While the Old Testament therefore ought to be looked at as prefigurative and performative throughout, it must also be regarded equally throughout as inferior and subordinate to the New. The Old Testament, in fact, was faithful as a servant for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after, but the New Testament is chief over its own house, which house are we. The Old Testament made nothing perfect, and parts of it which were glorious to the Jew, though really only a ministry of condemnation to them and to all, to Christians have but little glory, by reason of the excelling glory of the New. What was good as preparatory is not best as permanent : the scaffolding, the blade of the corn, the portrait, compared with the building, the corn in the ear, the person. But compared with any other writings whatsoever except the Christian, the Hebrew Scriptures are indeed superior, and even generically different throughout : revealing an idea of GOD such as nowhere else is to be found among the records of men, and inculcating principles and precepts which cultivated the conscience of the Jew to a degree elsewhere unknown. Indeed there is no way of becoming so impressed with their dignity and their worth as by comparing the highest and deepest philosophy of

heathenism with the popular and fundamental faith of the Hebrew people. The speculations of Plato and Cicero are among the strongest evidences for the reality of the Revelations of Moses and of Isaiah.

XII.

A spiritual interpretation of Revelation necessary.

The views then of the significance of the Bible suggested in these pages are of a character intermediate between the literal and the rational—such as would fain have characteristically the reality, if not the name, of spiritual.

The literal principle viewing all parts of Scripture as equally and directly Divine, both in origin and authority, considers all the representations of the Divine nature, and all the particulars of moral commandment which are to be found in the Bible as portions of one universal and permanent law: and endeavours to reduce all these distinct utterances into a consistent and coherent whole by argumentative deductions from their letter. It considers the Bible practically as a collection of contemporaneous utterances equally addressed, in all but ceremonial ordinances, to all men of all time: and strives to make a Divine Philosophy out of a Divine Revelation, by blending metaphysical processes with Scriptural assertions. Owing little to any contemplation of Revelation as the gradual development of a scheme even not yet perfected, or rather founded on assumptions which such a view would seem to subvert, it is sternly opposed to whatever transfers attention from the literal significance of detached passages, or attempts to discriminate between things more and less excellent in the Scriptures.

The rational principle proceeds on the assumption that if Revelation be conceivable at all, it will reveal nothing which man's reason does not approve when revealed, though it might not be able to discover it; and that therefore there can be nothing which is really Revelation but that for which a place can be found in a philosophy independently constructed, and which that philosophy can account for. All else it considers as human addition, which need be dealt with without any particular reverence. It thus makes a philosophy the test of a religion, and the standard for the interpretation of its records. It is based on a disbelief of any special Divine influence having established any source of knowledge or authority supplementary to the laws of nature and of conscience, and makes the mind of man practically the measure of what is to be believed, or can be revealed. The Rationalist, indeed, makes the whole subject of Religion and Revelation, their facts and doctrines, a matter of sensible evidence or intellectual demonstration, and reduces all belief to an impartial estimate of the probabilities furnished by a past experience. The Rationalist thus walks by sight only and by faith not at all: measuring supersensual objects only by logical and other terrestrial apparatus, and neglecting or distrusting, or being destitute of, those spiritual affinities and aspirations which afford a legitimate and especial evidence of their own.

Far different indeed from this is that Spiritualism which these pages would inculcate. It considers all true Religion as a Revelation of GOD to man: GOD communicating Himself to His creatures, as the Father of their spirits, and man recognising and reverencing the communication as

Divine. And it therefore is always open to any supernatural visitation, its instinct being to hope for such: but at the same time its reverence is equal to its hopefulness, and it therefore scrutinises with a severity with which it would care to scrutinise nothing else, whatever presumes to be Divine. It considers faith very much as a moral act: as at least a yielding to our natural veneration and aspiration wherever these cannot be pronounced false or wrong by our reason or our conscience. It does not make any independently established notions or systems of man the test of Scriptural Revelations. It does not at all assume to say what ought, or ought not, to be revealed beyond the mere irrepressible instincts and interdicts of the conscience and the reason. Its fundamental principle is to observe what appears to be revealed, and then to make the substance of that Revelation to interpret the detail of it—the spirit of it to explain the letter—and most especially the latest Revelations to modify and illustrate all others. Considering all systems of philosophy hitherto promulgated as too uncertain to be used as measures of the worth of anything which may possibly be more certain than themselves, it uses them only suggestively and not conclusively; and though it does not reject any light which may come from any quarter whatsoever, its main endeavour is to get at some idea of the significance of the Bible as a whole, and of the relation of its parts to each other—believing that though there is no complete system of truth in it, yet that there is a certain symmetry and proportion in it which it is essential to recognise, and that it possesses prominent aims and a peculiar spirit to which every specified statement ought to be referred and subordinated.

XIII.

Arguments in favour of literal infallibility.

But to many minds quite other views of the sacred Scriptures present themselves, which give a far different form and colouring to the Revelation of GOD.

To such it seems, that the sacred Scriptures must be literally infallible, otherwise they would not be worthy of the name of a Revelation : that the Bible, Old and New Testament equally, is and must be in all its parts a Revelation of pure truth : and that no principle of Accommodation, if any of progression, can be recognised with regard either to the letter or the spirit of the Old Testament, except in the case of the Mosaic ceremonial.

To such it seems, That there can be no discrepancies or errors of any kind in the Bible, Old Testament or New, and that all appearances of such must be considered by the true believer as either results of his ignorance, or trials for his faith : and that to believe otherwise is to reject the express testimony of CHRIST and his Apostles.

And finally to such it seems, that the principles of these pages, by admitting so much to be indefinite, undermine, if they do not destroy, all certainty, and nearly all benefit, connected with a written Revelation, and by their general vague spiritualism must encourage the carnal scepticism, or injure the evangelical piety, of those who embrace them.

Now, before examining in detail some of the assertions here presented, it may not be unadvisable to make the two following remarks :—

Such a theory of Divine Revelation as these objections indicate is largely Judaic, or even Gentile, and wholly

traditional, and therefore not likely to be also purely or characteristically Christian. This theory is precisely the same as that which all heathen nations who have had, or have, sacred books, have always entertained; it is the same as that which the Mahommedans entertain of theirs. It has therefore no antecedent presumption of spirituality to recommend it, but some considerable presumption of the natural mind to discountenance it. And it is more rigid even than the elder Judaism. We do not know indeed the theoretic opinion of the Jews before their captitivy concerning their sacred books; we only know that their practical carefulness of them, or reverence for them, was so very inconsiderable, that it would seem as if they did not attach to them a respect equal to that which the most latitudinarian of modern theorists, who acknowledge them as a Revelation at all, would certainly ascribe to them. Indeed for all this long period no people on earth of whom we have any record, so generally treated their sacred writings with indifference as the Jews—a fact indeed proving now for us little more than the small amount of evidence of any worth which can be deduced in favour of any rigid theory from this large portion of Jewish History. Between the time of their return from captivity and that of our Lord's appearing, there would seem indeed to have been all the reverence and carefulness which we should have expected, but the precise belief of the most valuable authorities we have not the opportunity of learning. Whatever it might have been, or ought to have been, it would seem to have admitted of different degrees of Divine influence : the highest belonging to the Law, the second to the Prophets, and somewhat less to the rest. We know at

least that no other portions of what then constituted the Jewish Scriptures but the five books of Moses were for centuries of this period used in the public teaching of the nation; and when afterwards portions of the Prophets were substituted for the Law, and some of the Psalms were used in the occasional services of the Temple, the other books were never used at all for such purposes.

Doubtless the more modern Jews have very definite opinions concerning their Scriptures (though these admit of the doctrine of degree), but their opinions concerning most things being fundamentally false, may very probably be so concerning this. Until lately we know they believed, and taught us to believe, that all the manuscripts of their Law were immaculate, and the same to a letter: and under this belief in transcribing their standard manuscripts they preserved and perpetuated obvious inaccuracies, and made a science, falsely so called, of the mystical meanings of these errors; they also noted the number of words and letters in each book, and the number of times certain words occurred, and the position of certain others with regard to the first and last word, and many other minutiæ of the same kind; which notes of theirs have done much for the purity of the modern text, but have left the great dogma of Literal Infallibility demonstrably untenable.

And then again, This theory has been gradually more and more refuted by facts as our scholarship has improved, and has been reluctantly but irrecoverably abandoned by all the most considerable of modern scholars, even by those whose reverence for the Scriptures is the greatest. A century ago it was believed by the best scholars that there were very few, if any, variations in Hebrew manuscripts,

and much was said and written concerning the miraculousness of this fact proving may things: but now it is admitted on all hands, in consequence of the subsequent examination of many hundreds of copies, that there are tens of thousands of variations among them. All therefore concerning literal infallibility which was founded upon this assumption falls to the ground at once, and henceforth it is not possible that there should be any question regarding this matter, but one as to the degree of fallibility. It is most important that this should be distinctly understood and continually borne in mind; as it cannot but greatly simplify and clarify the subject of which these pages treat.

XIV.

What kind of book the analogy of Nature would lead us to expect.

As to the saying, That the sacred Scriptures must be literally infallible, otherwise they would not be worthy of the name of a Revelation, it is replied, that we shall assuredly do much better in all such questions as the present to examine what GOD has done than to pronounce what GOD must do—to study carefully and humbly the general outline and spirit of His special dispensations of grace towards man, rather than first to make up our minds as to what ought to have been done, and then to judge of what has been done by this. To many minds it must ever appear pure presumption to assert that no Revelation can be accepted from GOD but one which in no jot or tittle shall be mingled with human imperfections. To be grateful for the least Revelation, however conveyed to us, this is an essential predisposition, in every one who would profit by any communication from heaven: and to prescribe the very

vessels in which the water of life must be brought to us, is either a morbid sensitiveness of taste implying an absence of real spiritual thirst, or an ingratitude of heart which is wholly irreligious. Some help and knowledge, and comfort of promise, according to our need, this we may humbly hope for, and reasonably expect: but to demand to be fed no otherwise than by perpetual miracle, is an irreverence which betrays an utter unconsciousness of our due position. And consider well whether there be any thing in GOD'S provision for man's use in nature, or in His dealings with man historically, which should lead us to any expectation of such perfectly unmixed nourishment and infallible guidance. Man's natural position on earth emphatically teaches him otherwise. Man comes into the world with very ill-ascertained, or at least very imperfectly-expressed, relations to all that it contains, and it is only by long schooling, silent and severe, from the great multitude of things about him, that he becomes assured of his position among them. His knowledge of the greatest duties of life and his obedience to them, are the results of most indefinite influences: and he has no self-interpreting infallible guide for half the actions which it is his highest interest to perform: no pillar of cloud or of fire to lead him in his march either through the desert or the throng of life. The world he lives in is full of poison as well as of food, and he has to nourish himself out of it rather through the exercise of a tentative experience than by the aid of an infallible instinct. There is nothing in the natural world which modern thought terms pure. Air is not, and water is not, and yet we live by these. There is a husk around many a wholesome fruit, or an unprofitable stone within: and the very staff of life needs to be sepa-

rated from its chaff, and variously compounded, before it can be used for the food of man. The nourishment that lies in Nature is not disposed according to a scientific chemistry: rather there is a considerable portion of all natural food which is useful though not nutritious, serving rather for the vehicle than for the substance of our support. And perhaps so is it, so must it be, with all our spiritual food while we are in the flesh. Truth cannot be given us in essence, but only diffused and diluted in innutritious masses, for thus only, it may be, could it be so received as to be assimilated. And really are we to complain of this? Are we indeed so spiritually refined that no bread will satisfy our hunger but that which is as angels' food—that there can be no slaking of our thirst but with distilled water? Most vain thought this. Truly such as we have no reason to expect, and much more no right to demand, that if GOD condescends to make to man supernatural communications, these communications should have a heavenly form as well as a heavenly spirit—that they should be eternally true and purely perfect—allowing of no contact with earthly imperfections, no commingling with human infirmities. We have no title to require to be taught only by GOD speaking to us face to face, or writing with His finger on tables of stone, and not through the intervention of mediators of like passions and of like language with ourselves: but rather should be inexpressibly thankful to receive His Law by the disposition of angels, and His Gospel by the hands of the friends of the Son of GOD.

And would it not require a constant miraculous intervention to make such a body of Scripture as has been given us wholly infallible? It is indeed conceivable that a Reve-

lation might have been given to us written supernaturally in an universal and perfect language, and might perpetually have been guarded by the same supernatural Power and Wisdom which communicated it: but at the very first aspect of it our Bible is not such a Revelation: its language is all such as has once been commonly spoken by whole nations, liable in its first delivery to the inadequacies of human utterance, and in its subsequent transmission to the fallibilities of human care.

XV.

The lesson which is taught by the analogy of history.

And if we look at GOD'S dealings with man historically, and ground our expectations on these, we surely have no encouragement to anticipate any such interposition as that which a pure and infallible Revelation would imply. On the contrary, all analogies and precedents lead us very forcibly in a quite opposite direction. There is nothing which a study of the history of mankind (if the very minute portion of it which we can really make ourselves even most imperfectly acquainted with may permit the use of such large terms) more emphatically teaches us than that GOD has left large liberty to man—such liberty indeed as shows us the utter vanity of any special anticipations which we can in any case make as to the plan on which any portion of mankind ought to have been governed or guided. No scheme which we should have ever thought of, if the problem had first been submitted to us abstractedly, for the government of any one nation on earth which we know of, would at all have corresponded with what we see historically to have been the case. This we may say, because now that we have the history of the solu-

tion of the problem of the race in a good measure before us, we cannot at all adequately understand it, or intelligently prophesy from it of the future. The dim outlines of Providential interference we deem it not presumptuous to say we see in some portions of human history, and the indestructible persuasion that there must be everywhere a subtle influence for good which we do not see, may induce us sometimes to fill in these outlines with some colourable expression : but the most highly developed of mortal minds has not dared to claim for its sketch of any portion of the past any more than its being the very faintest image or imagination of the secret counsels of the Infinite Mind ; and as to the future, has ever felt it an instinct of Reverence to allow clouds, if not darkness, to rest upon it.

And then, too, consider what GOD's dealings have been with that very people to whom He vouchsafed these special Revelations. How gradually and indefinitely did His messages come, and how exceedingly much of liberty did He allow to the will of man even in the government of His peculiar people. How unlike is the history of the Theocratic people to anything we should have anticipated had we only known the principle and aim of their constitution—so unlike that it has been found most difficult even to this day to get many pious students of it to understand, or even to admit as possible, several of its real characteristics. There are probably very few who represent to themselves in all its true carnality the life of the majority of Hebrew people for the greater portion of their history before their captivity ; and all of us Christianise that life to our minds unconsciously, because we do not separate sufficiently between the possession of privilege and the

improvement of it, nor understand distinctly how great liberty GOD has left to man to neglect and pervert the very choicest of His gifts. But even so far as privilege is concerned, we hardly conceive adequately what it was to live under a dispensation in which a future life was never in any way publicly and authoritatively made prominent as a matter of belief, or a motive of conduct, and in which the very cardinal article of a Christian's creed—the Incarnation of Godhead—was not so revealed as ever to be deemed by an ordinary Jew either an expected or a possible event.

And then when that Messiah did come whom the Jewish nation was constituted to typify and proclaim, how without a shock it was—His advent blending with the events of ordinary history so as to develop itself without subverting them: abolishing the old Divine economy simply by introducing one diviner still. That great Law which had been the wonder and worship of ages, and deemed by all its subjects as everlasting, was never authoritatively repealed or expressly commanded to cease: it was only superseded by being surpassed: made to melt away as the dawn does unto the day: abrogated in the letter by being more than fulfilled in the spirit.

And with the history of the Chrstian Church has it not been also the same? Has it not blended itself intimately with the history of the world, and so prevailed? No human wisdom would probably have permitted so great a commingling —so gradual a progress: for it yet remains a mystery to the thoughtful that it should have been so imperfect and so impure for so long, and that when it was established on earth at such a cost, so many ages should have passed away without more having been accomplished by it than we see.

These things, and many more such as these, do not coincide with our expectations, but contradict them: wherefore it is suggested that we ought not to settle it in our minds that we are able to say beforehand what degree of Divine influence must be exerted in any special part of the great process of human education; and that it is the only fitting position for us to occupy, to study the supernatural as the philosopher studies the natural—to make it its own interpreter as far as we can, and beyond this not to be dogmatic. Our observation of the course of GOD'S providential dealings with the world at large, and with His specially favoured people, certainly renders it safe to say—what it would be wise to remember—that He is not prodigal of Revelation. The opening of the heavens is but a rare event in the history of mankind: so rare that we may henceforth be perfectly prepared to expect that miraculous communications will never be made only to secure human infallibility in unspiritualminutiæ. Indeed no truth can be more plain, and few are more important to be observed, than that stability and silence are characteristics of GOD'S government of the spiritual world no less than of the natural.

XVI.

The blending of the Human and Divine in the Bible—a reflex of God's spiritual dealings with men.

Truly the longer we ponder on the position of man on the earth, of the individual and of the race, the more we must feel the indefiniteness and complexity of the influences by which his education has been and is always carried on: how immeasurable is that system of agencies which the Divine Will has provided to work together for unfolding his

spiritual capacities, and culturing his religious nature. And the more, too, probably we shall feel that this blending of the human and the Divine which we imagine we see so clearly in that special agency for man's religious culture which the Bible is, is a characteristic of all GOD'S spiritual dealings with man. However mysterious may be such studies, and however vague may be our consequent impressions, it might be well for us if we gave some careful attention to this course of GOD'S Providence in general history, that we might better learn to recognise, if not to understand, the power of His presence among men at all times, and how His more special manifestations of that power are not anomalous and isolated instances of His Providence, but only instances which being more visible to human eye, may teach us to suspect that presence where we cannot see it. No adequate views of GOD'S processes of dealing with His creatures can ever be taken by any who do not recognise this His constant Providence over them as a fundamental assumption—an article of faith indeed most difficult—wholly impossible—for us so to follow out as to make visible, but of all doctrines undemonstrable the most credible. The very existence of a will in man—of something in him, that is, which has a life in itself—seems to demand a Providence much more than Nature does. Dead matter when once made active may very conceivably continue so indefinitely without disorder: but a will once created, what that may do can never seem to us as certain. A power, therefore, establishing and maintaining the dominion and growth of moral influences in the world—directing men's path onwards, and helping them to walk in it—this would be credible without any Revelation concerning it.

And so far as we can venture to speak of such subjects at all as matters of sight, we might say that, apart from Revelation, we do see a constant and continuous co-operation of the Divine and human activities in some parts of the history of the world commonly called profane, though such co-operation is undoubtedly obscured to our vision by being involved in that great mystery, everywhere underlying and overarching us, how the Creative Will can so withdraw from the created as to allow man to have any action of his own, and how it can also mingle itself with man's without overwhelming it. But if Divine influence in the education of man has probably been exercised in general history to a greater extent than is commonly recognised, it may also be said that in those cases where it is most especially contended for, the method in which it has been exerted on man has been dynamical rather than merely mechanical. It has ever been a vivifying and animating operation—heightening and deepening and widening the energies and capacities of the natural soul, and giving it a region of sensibility and a range of vision beyond those of its normal state, but yet it may be as much in accordance with that state as the microscope and the telescope are in accordance with the eye, when they extend for us so largely the capacities of our natural vision. It certainly seems a fixed fundamental part of GOD'S plan to carry on the improvement of mankind by the instrumentality of men. The great stages of progress in civilisation have been wrought out by the accumulation of human labour, or by the mission among us of gifted individuals who have the power of unclosing new chambers, or even regions, of spiritual vision which all men may henceforth enter and abide in, as the common partrimony of the race. And in all

such cases where GOD has employed man as His agent, He has never employed him merely as His instrument. He has ever recognised in him an attribute of will which has ennobled him in some faint measure into an image of Himself: and therefore it may be that in employing man in the noblest portion of that noble work, He may well be considered as not to have superseded in him altogether those faculties of his nature which in many other portions of the same work have proved essentially adequate to their aim, but only to have heightened His illuminating influence, and extended His superintending Providence, in proportion to the importance of the aim to be accomplished.

Such analogies therefore as these which have been adverted to may not unreasonably be adduced. For the exercise of Divine influence in the composition and preservation of the Bible is after all but a portion of GOD'S Providence over the history of man generally, and of His Church especially. It is one act of that Providence, and therefore may not unreasonably be expected to be in general harmony with other acts of that same paternal mind. The gift of the Bible is but one of the many gifts of GOD for the education of man, and is therefore not to be judged of as an isolated act, comprehending all that has been done, or is doing, for the guidance of man's spirit: more especially as it was a gift which was spread over at least some fifty generations of our race. It is rather to be classed most justly, not with those instances of Divine interposition which are most commonly called miraculous, but with those which we call providential—instances which imply indeed to our carnal apprehensions a more direct exercise of Divine volition than we recognise in the ordinary course of our observation, but which do not

for the most appear to us as signs and as wonders, startling the senses, and confounding the understanding, but blending themselves with human agency by connections inscrutable in their processes though palpable in their results—causing no abrupt shock in human affairs, but at the same time altering irresistibly human purposes, and ordering the unruly wills of men to ends they thought not of.

XVII.

The Bible, a providential inheritance, not a miraculous gift.

The whole history of the formation of the Canons both of the Old and New Testament, and of the preservation and transmission of them to our times, confirms this Providential, and not miraculous, character of the Divine influence connected with the Bible. Here all seems to the ordinary eye (to which what we call miracles, be it remembered, are always addressed) to have been left to the action of influences which we do not call miraculous. With regard to the Jewish Scriptures we have these facts to consider: That many of the books which they contain are anonymous, and no one can now certainly say who wrote them, or when they were written, save within large limits—sometimes of several centuries: that certainly some could not have been written until many centuries after the events which they record; and that equally certainly others could not have been left in their present state if written by the persons to whom popular tradition assigns them. Indeed almost all the books placed in our Bibles between the Pentateuch and Isaiah are of unknown date and authorship, except certain of the Psalms. And the composition of the Pentateuch itself, as we at present have it, is not entirely clear to us as

wholly of the Mosaic period : the first of its books contains documents obviously of a much older date than that of Moses, and also passages of a much later date : while the book of Deuteronomy seems to bear something of the same relation to the preceding four that the Gospel of St. John does to the Synoptic three. And throughout almost all the historic books we find traces of their having been edited by some later hand, and we have no means of knowing the extent to which this editorial influence has extended. For by whom the books of the Old Testament were collected into one volume, and by what authority made canonical, we do not know. Doubtless there is a popular tradition, and one widely received, that this work was done by Ezra : but this is but a tradition, and by no means has the dignity of a fact of history, and is not favoured by any amount of evidence which entitles it to be the foundation of any considerable superstructure.

And on what principle the collection was made, this we do not know. Why Job or Ecclesiastes which make no mention of any special Jewish Revelation, and why Esther and Canticles which make no mention even of GOD, should be admitted into the Hebrew Canon, we do not know. And why the books appealed to in the existing Canon as of similar value with the Canonical should not have found a place in it, we cannot say. If it be said, that they were not in existence at the time when the Canon was formed, then we are presented with the remarkable fact, that as many historical and preceptive books once deemed authoritative by the Jews have been lost as have been preserved—and these books written by such as Samuel and Solomon, by Nathan, Iddo and Gad, by Isaiah and Jeremiah, besides

books of the Chronicles of the kingdoms both of Judah and of Israel. And this is a fact which confirms the view here taken of such uncertainty and indefiniteness attending the constitution of the Old Testament Canon as strongly to countenance the assertion that no miraculous intervention has taken place in its formation. Few questions affecting the faith of men could well be more important, if Divine virtue is to be ascribed to every portion of the letter of Scripture, than that sacred and profane Scripture should be broadly distinguished from each other. But the boundary line between them is really more indistinct than the unstudious would suppose, and it would be most difficult for such to pronounce self-justifying judgments between the claims of Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus, or between those of the Song and of the Wisdom of Solomon. The book of Baruch is separated from the book of Esther by but a very slight difference in the character of its evidence, and the Canonical lists of some of the earliest Christian Churches included some of the Jewish books which we reject. When such uncertainty rests upon the formation of the Canon, can absolute sacredness be asserted of every portion of everything within it? And if the Canon of the Hebrew Scripture has been formed without any visible special Divine interference, does it not render it probable that any rigid theory concerning such interference in its composition may not be necessary?

Formation and preservation of the Canon of Old Testament Scriptures.

XVIII.

And if it was thus with the formation of the Canon, so it was also with the preservation and transmission of the Sacred Books from the first. From the account of these

books themselves it would appear that no people could have been less careful of their Sacred Writings than the Jews were previous to their captivity. Indeed no nation on earth that we know of, while subsisting in its integrity, ever were so indifferent to their Sacred Law, or at least ever acted so continuously in disregard to it, as the Jews must have done, if they possessed it from the first in that completeness in which we have it now. One would have thought that the most natural, and even the altogether obligatory, method to be pursued would have been to have multiplied copies of it, and to have made the Levites the public guardians and teachers of it. But we have no reason for supposing that this was the case. From the time of Joshua to the time of David we find no notice of the existence of any Sacred Writings we now have (those writings to which reference is made not now existing:) and the state of political and social and religious life which we find to have prevailed for all these centuries did not admit of any literal or reverent observance of such a scheme of ritual as we see prescribed in the existing code. Only for half a century in the reigns of David and Solomon does such observance seem to have been possible. For immediately after this period, the idolatrous state of the ten tribes of Israel precluded any profession even of such observance there: and even in Judah—in the eighteenth year of the pious Josiah, which was but a little before the Babylonish removal—the very priests seem to have been ignorant of the existence of a written copy of the Law. For in the national chronicles preserved to our time we read that a 'book of the law of the Lord given by Moses' having been discovered unexpectedly in the Temple, it was

thought so considerable an event as to form an occasion for a thorough restoration and renewed regulation of the national worship. It may surely be said that there is nothing parallel to this in the history of any nation with which we are acquainted. And it is the more remarkable, inasmuch as in our present copies of that Law we find a most singularly anticipatory command, that every king on his accession to the throne should write out for himself a copy of the Law from that which was kept by the priests and Levites: and yet neither this omission, nor other violations of this law, were ever, as far as we read, the subjects of the rebukes or expostulations of any of the prophets in their exhortations to any of the kings. Whatever may be the full significance of these facts, they cannot but be deemed such as require us to pause for their patient consideration: and as furnishing us for our present purpose with an admonition, that in much relating to the course of Divine Providence in the history of Revelation we must expect to find our anticipations contradicted rather than confirmed.

It is also a fact which may be illustrative of this unexpected condition of things, that any definite body of Sacred Scripture is not distinctly appealed to, or commented upon, in the writings of the Prophets, as it is in the writings of the Apostles. We must remember too, that there is no Divine command that we know of—and even no Jewish authority, except that of Josephus—which would make us believe that the Historical or Prophetical Books were to be, or were, deposited in any sanctuary—much less placed by the side of the Law of Moses, which was commanded to be placed beside the ark.

And consider well the significance of the fact already referred to, that there are probably as many historical books lost by the Jews as were preserved by them—books apparently of the same authority as those we now possess, because appealed to by them as confirmatory of their statements, or as supplementary to them. The books of Chronicles alone have references to ten such books. And these books were not destroyed by the hands of enemies, or at least are never said to have been so; but simply lost, or allowed to decay through inattention. And so with regard to the original autographs of any of the books now preserved, their loss is never regretted, or even mentioned: nor is there anywhere any account of the fate of the second original Tables of stone.

And the Jews lost both their spoken language, and the characters in which it was written, during their comparatively short residence in Balylon: so that when they returned to their own land they could not understand Hebrew when read to them, but were obliged to have an interpreter: and the letters in which their Law was henceforth written were no longer the same as those in which it had been originally written on the Tables of stone, or by the hands of Moses. We know of no instances of national carelessness equal to this.

Indeed this may be considered as an under-statement of the case, if we listen to the Jews' own traditions, as conveyed to us through the early writers of the Christian Church; for these represent the whole Jewish Scriptures as having perished during the residence in Babylon, and to have been revealed afresh to Ezra.

Doubtless after the return from Babylon when the

Canon was once fixed, and the Jewish polity so completely organised as we never read of its having been before, the Jews were exceedingly and beyond all other people, it may be, careful of their Sacred Writings, and reverent towards them, and have been ever since. Their treatment of the Wisdom of the Son of Sirach which was originally written in Hebrew, and of the First Book of Maccabees which is so like some that are, show very plainly their jealous guardianship of the established Canon, in times not long after its establishment; while the minute and even superstitious care of later times is familiar to all. But still it may be justly and profitably suggested, that if so many important points in the history of the Hebrew Scriptures have been left in so great measure to the operation of ordinary laws, we cannot say beforehand what may not have been so left. Nothing could have been more different from the course which human providence would have taken for the securing of a permanent infallible Revelation: so different indeed is it that we must either abandon all attempts to understand it, or we must modify considerably our cherished prepossessions as to its being the intention of Divine Providence to give us through the Jews a Revelation which was to be literally and permanently infallible.

XIX.

Formation of the Canon of New Testament Scriptures.

And as it has been with the Hebrew Scriptures, so it has been also in some measure with the Christian. We can trace here nothing which bears the character of Miracle, though very much that is plainly Providential. Indeed in the case of the Christian Scriptures we are met at

the outset with facts which it seems impossible to make to conform to any rigid theory of Divine Influence.

Before all we should note, that we know of no intimation from our Lord that His Gospel should be written, as the Law of Moses was commanded to be. Nowhere that we know of did He lay such a charge upon His disciples while on earth, nor in those special Revelations which from time to time He made to some of His disciples after He had ascended up on high, do we find that such a charge was added, except, it may be, in one limited and special and anomalous instance. Nor does any one of those whose writings compose the Christian Canon profess to be writing a Law at the dictation of CHRIST, which should be a portion of a Code of universal obligation for the Church of all ages. It is rather obvious from the nature of their writings, that several of them could not have had such a calling or object present to their own minds. The personal and private nature of Luke's Gospel and Acts—which constitute so large and important a portion of our Scripture—is a notable instance of this: these writings of his being addressed professedly to an individual, and with a specified limitation of purpose: while the writer's preliminary declaration, 'It seemed good unto me,' is the faintest possible expression of the consciousness of any special Divine gift or commission. Nor do any of the writers seem to have ever seen the writings of any of the others (except it may be in one doubtful case): nor do they seem to have taken any measures for the uncorrupted preservation, or the universal diffusion, of their writings: and neither separately nor conjointly to have intimated to the Church that there ever should be a body of Christian Scriptures which

should be a sufficient Rule of Faith and Duty for all time.

Nor was the collection of their writings into such a Canonical body of Scriptures the result of any special Revelation, or the work of any Sacred commission: of any deliberate individual purpose even, or of any ecclesiastical provision of any kind. It was not any act of the Church universal, nor was it any act of any age. It was a very complex and a very gradual process—the work of many Churches and of several centuries. It was a result accomplished by the ordinary methods of human judgment —the weighing and sifting of traditional testimony, and the estimate of internal wealth: and by each Church endeavouring to secure for itself as complete a collection as it could of Apostolic writings, and then of the Church Catholic adopting those which were common to the collections of the most considerable Churches. Instead therefore of being deemed one definite act, it must be deemed the indefinite result of that Christian instinct and Christian tact which is the consequence of the general inhabitation of the Christian body by the Christian spirit—Christian principles and Christian sympathies operating according to their own laws, with unconscious tendencies in the members, but with the sure guidance of their Head. So much was this the case that the formation of that which was to be a rule for all else was not apparently itself framed according to any uniform rule that we can discover. Not only were the Gospels and Epistles which form that Canon a selection out of many others, some of which had the same pretensions as they have, made by men to whom we do not know that any special gifts qualifying them above others for the

purpose were vouchsafed, but the principles on which their judgments were made have not been delivered to us. Whatever these principles were, they were not such as apparently admit of a formal expression in rules: for while they admit as Canonical writings some which were certainly not Apostolical, they reject others which had an equal external claim to admission with some which have been admitted, being written by persons who were equally companions of the Apostles, and equally approved of by them. For instances, the earliest Churches did not deny that the Epistle of Barnabas was genuine, but they did not admit it as Holy Scripture, though Barnabas was a good man, and full of the HOLY GHOST: and the Epistle to the Hebrews has been ultimately admitted, though its authorship was never professedly determined. And what can be said of Mark or of Luke more than can be said of that Clement 'whose name is in the book of life,' but whose Epistle is not in the Scriptures of the Church? The Second Epistle of Peter and that of Jude have been spoken against from the first unto this day, and yet they have become Holy Scripture; and so long was the Apocalypse deemed ambiguous that it was not received in the Greek Churches in the time of St. Jerome.

But though this Canon of New Testament Scripture has been formed upon no rule that we can rigidly define, yet nothing need less be doubted than that such rule has been sufficient to secure to the Catholic Church and the individual Christian all that it is necessary for their spiritual life and growth to possess. Indeed this constitution of the Canon of Christian Scripture may ever be appealed to as a most illustrious instance of the reality and sufficiency of

that system of indefinite Divine Influence which is throughout these pages asserted as so often employed in producing the highest spiritual results in human history. No event has exercised greater influence on the character of the Church of CHRIST than the existence of the Christian Scriptures, and yet no event was less apparently miraculous as contra-distinguished from Providential. It was, it must be repeated, a result of the exercise of that enlightened and sanctified spiritual judgment which is the special continuous endowment of all ages of the Church—which if duly honoured would be found equal to great tasks always, and which if unduly dishonoured will be found to leave us in difficulties which will be also dangers. This case of the Christian Canon is a case in point. For if none but a literal line and measure of canonicity will be accepted, in this case there is none forthcoming: if Christian tact and discerning of spirit be despised, there is nothing which remains in their stead.

For consider, how is it possible to substantiate the claim of the directest Divine Influence on any literal rule in the case of a composition of which we do not know the author, which does not claim such influence for itself, and for which such influence is not claimed by any one who had better means or right than ourselves of testifying to the fact. And such is the case with the Epistle to the Hebrews. And who can guarantee to us the infallibility of Luke? or what know we of the extraordinary gifts of Mark? How is it possible for us to know that every word which we find written by these is to be taken as an authoritative exposition of the mind of GOD in CHRIST? Such claims as these—claims which are unrestrained consequences of the

notion of infallible Divine Scripture—are such as it is quite awful to make for any men, and which it is an instinct of reverence in any man to hesitate in receiving. It is but little for this purpose to say, that they were honest and spiritual men—veracious and well-informed: much more than this is required before we need, or dare, receive them as authoritative exponents of the truth of GOD. Admitting that they were the most truthful of all men, this is far, very far, from proving that they were infallible: nor would their possession of any limited measures of all the moral virtues and Christian graces be sufficiently strong ground to build such infinite inferences on as a direct Revelation from GOD would warrant. However scrupulously exact and extensively informed they might be, yet they might consistently omit actions and words of our Lord which if revealed would have modified the impressions we now receive from those which they have left us; and in those which they have recorded they may very conceivably in some cases have confounded the universal and the particular—what was actually commanded and what was only permitted: they may have converted a prayer into a prophecy, or an utterance of thanksgiving into a fact of history—they may have misapplied a quotation, or misunderstood an allusion, or mistranslated an expression—so as to have coloured their narration, quite blamelessly as far as their own moral character was concerned, and quite innocuously when only general truthfulness is expected, but to an extent which may readily and widely mislead those who are irreverent enough to look in the words of a disciple of an Apostle for the infinite knowledge which dwelt only in the Apostles' Master.

Most earnestly therefore is it here exhorted that those who press on others a rigid theory of Divine Influence in the composition of the Scriptures, should take good heed that this their measure of hard dealing does not return upon themselves to their very serious hurt. The letter of a bond is often not worth its spirit, and certainly in this case if they will accept no title deeds for their heavenly inheritance but Scriptures written with pen and ink, and signed and sealed with visible tokens, they will find that in the great day of need they will have over-reached themselves, and be destitute indeed.

XX.

Facts concerning existing copies of the Holy Scriptures.

The state of the existing copies of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures may also well be considered as largely aiding to disprove this supposition of literal Infallibility. For however desirable it may seem abstractedly that there should be some standard of such infallibility, it is a fact that there is none such. And GOD would have us take facts for lessons. Among such consider these: There is no original autograph of any portion of the Sacred Scriptures at this time existing in the world, and there is no copy of the Bible existing which is a transcript of any one manuscript. All the Bibles which there are now are made complete by the union of transcripts from many different manuscripts. The oldest manuscripts which are used in the construction of our modern Bibles are all imperfect, and most of them but fragmentary. And no manuscript which we have of the Christian Scriptures was written before the fourth century: and none of any part of the

Hebrew Scriptures was written before the twelfth century after CHRIST. There are no two manuscripts, either of the Hebrew or of the Christian Scriptures, which are verbally alike; and there is not one of either which cannot be demonstrated to be verbally incorrect. Wherefore the very best copy of the Bible in the original tongues is in some measure a conjectural compilation made by human scholarship out of many thousand verbal and literal variations.

Most true it is indeed that these variations, though so numerous, are not important in any spiritual view of Scripture, and do not materially affect a single doctrine or duty of Jewish or Christian faith. Those in the Hebrew Scriptures are chiefly of so slight a character that very many of them can even scarcely be made intelligible to those who are not Hebrew scholars: and those in the Christian, though more considerable, need not materially impair a single article of the Catholic Creed. And this is a fact of very great significance for those who hold no rigid theory of Divine influence; such know and feel that the errors which they meet with, though to them unquestionably errors, are so inconsiderable in amount that they never would have been considered as difficulties if they had not been asserted to be impossibilities: and even now they scarcely seem to them worthy to be dwelt on for more than a moment amid the vast treasures of truth in which they are imbedded. In fact they consider them to be but of infinitesimal consequence to any students of the Bible except to those who are accustomed to associate the attribute of universal infallibility with those minds which have been permitted to become in any measure the agents of Divine communications, and to believe that no record of

such communications can be accepted as sufficient, but one wherein the letter is as Divine as the spirit. But for these they are not inconsiderable: they are facts of the very greatest consequence: for Infallibility is not a matter of degree: its very aim is to preclude all doubt: and that which is regarded as altogether and equally Divine cannot wisely or intelligibly be divided into two such diverse parts as the essential and the unimportant. And if it be once admitted that portions of every copy of the Scriptures now extant in the world are not certainly Divine, are even demonstrably human—as probably it is now admitted by every one who is not justly obnoxious to rebuke if he speak at all on this subject—then it becomes of the utmost importance to point out indisputably which these portions are, and which only, and then also equally to pronounce what is the Divine truth which they supplant. Now it is impossible to prevent an element of fallibility from entering here: if for no other reason at least for this, that the arguments and the evidence which have to be weighed for such determinations are among the most difficult and the most complicated that can be proposed to human faculties, and there is no Divine supplementary assistance vouchsafed to influence or to authenticate our decisions.

Of course it may be said, that though we have not now a literally infallible copy of the Scriptures, yet that the first Scriptures might have been so, and thus the expectation of a perfect Revelation have been fulfilled: but to this it is sufficient to reply, that this is a matter which we cannot decide but by assumption, as we have no facts but those which point in a contrary direction: and that if so decided, it would not be of any great interest to us who have not

that infallible Revelation which others may have had. But it has this argument against it, that it does not seem likely that so great a gift as that of Infallibility should have been given only to be immediately lost again or withdrawn.

XXI.

Discrepancies between different parts of the Bible.

But verbal imperfections are not all that a careful student who searches the Scriptures without any other prepossession than that of indefinite reverence will find in them. It is not however intended here to dwell on that large class of difficulties which are presented to us in all parts and periods of the Bible, from the contradictions between the knowledge which we now possess of the material universe and the history of mankind, and that more imperfect knowledge which was possessed by its writers, but simply to notice—and that most briefly—some which arise from a comparison of one part of the Bible with another. It is so ungracious and displeasing a task, however, to point permanently to even the minutest specific imperfections of that which is deemed as a whole the most reverend of all things on earth, that it shall suffice to say that the verbal and numerical difficulties between the books of Chronicles on the one side, and of the books of Samuel and of Kings on the other, are not simply so frequent, but so systematic, that these alone would require some less inflexible theory than that of infallibility, and that he who would not deceive himself in sacred matters ought first to set about the task of honestly reconciling these books with any such theory, before he rejects such suggestions as to whether it be not immaterial if they cannot be so reconciled.

Difficulties of the same kind occur in the reconciliation of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah: and of another but similarly cogent, though minute, kind occur in those remarkable passages in the historical books which recognise a chronology far subsequent to the time when the books themselves are generally supposed to have been written, as in those instances where we find in Genesis a list of 'the kings that reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned any king over the children of Israel,' and in Nehemiah, the genealogy of the high priests continued to the times of Alexander the Great. And those who are aware of the peculiar structure of the earlier parts of Genesis: of the twofold composition of Judges: of the separable nature of the book of the Prophecies of Isaiah: of the difficulties attendant upon the books of Daniel and of Esther, and of the change of opinion which has of late become prevalent as to the dates of the books of Job and Ecclesiastes, and consequently as to their authorship, will know how much need there may be for some change also in the old opinion concerning their literal infallibilty. And it may be added, that those who are not aware of these things, are not yet qualified to pronounce that when they do become so such facts may not interfere with their prepossessions.

Doubtless the exaggeration of these difficulties, which has been often made, is very sad: but the denial of these difficulties, or the ignoring of them, has its sad side too: and if the one tendency betokens something more than the remorselessness of a thorough criticism, the other exhibits also something more than the fair assurance of faith. And to one who is much more anxious about the result of the contest than the merits of the combatants, and who would

accept truth from the hand of an adversary, and reject untruth from any hand, it will probably remain yet apparent that there is a large amount of difficulty, and contradiction to old impressions, which has not been removed by the solutions which have been hitherto proposed. The opposing criticism has for the most part indeed served to confirm the impression of the general worth of the mass of the writings which compose the Sacred Canon, and thus given thoughtful minds some additional confidence in the future stability of that which has now been so often and so ably assaulted, and yet retains so much unshaken: but still there have at the same time been rendered manifest to such many weaknesses of construction and defence which cannot henceforth be wisely or safely disregarded. Doubtless for many the ingenious and confident solutions of various difficulties which have been brought forward will seem to be very satisfactory: but this is not so to all: and the degree in which these solutions will be considered successful cannot but vary with the varying qualifications of the judge. And in the case of those to whom there is a considerable residuum of difficulty unexplained, principles of interpretation which will permit us to consider some discrepancies and imperfections as innocuous, seem almost necessary for a peaceful faith in the large remainder of the Sacred Canon.

XXII.

Contradiction between the spirit of Old and New Testament.

Confining ourselves for a while to the consideration of the Old Testament Scripture, though these remarks are in some measure equally applicable to the New, it may be well to return upon that peculiarity of its accommodation which

was noticed above, in so far as it connects itself with the subjects just noticed, as they mutually illustrate each other. For of all the difficulties which present themselves in our reading the Hebrew Scriptures, by far the most urgent is the contradiction which we feel between much of the spirit which was there sanctioned and approved, and that which is the first commandment of the New. This has been so frequently and so forcibly felt by many in all ages—by the most pious as well as by the less so—that it has been a constant subject of difficulty and discussion. In the earliest ages of the Church this was so much the case that the Old Testament was supposed by many to have had an origin the most opposed to Divine, while in our modern times it has certainly presented to objectors the most fertile source of arguments and excuses for rejecting the Newer Testament, wherever its claims have been placed on the same level with those of the Older Scripture. Most of the attacks against Christianity have come through the side of Judaism, and most of those against the New Testament through that of the Old. And however unfair or inconsiderate such attacks may be, and however unjust such conclusions, yet so long as the principle of progression and accommodation in GOD'S Revelations is not recognised but rejected, there will always seem to some a certain measure of reasonableness and healthy moral instinct in the distaste which is felt towards much of the spirit of the Hebrew Scriptures. In such case no explanations or expositions will avail to remove the first impressions conveyed by the fact of the slaughter of the Canaanites being said to be in its details the command of the Most High: nor will enable us to reconcile with the later Revelations of

Deity, the other suggestions and approvals which we find ascribed to GOD in the histories of several of the Judges: or the commands which were given, and the spirit which was exhibited, by several of the most conspicuous of the Prophets. The execrations of several of the Psalms ever have appeared, and ever will appear, incongruous with that peculiar spirit which the Christian is to be of, while many of the habits, and practices, and views of the most approved of old time will obviously not bear to be transferred to our conception of any New Testament saint. So long as we are not permitted to believe that GOD gave precepts of Duty and Revelations of Truth to His people of old only as they could bear them, and tolerated the co-existence and commingling of much darkness of the natural man with the special illuminations of His Spirit, so long we cannot but contrast, and contrasting pronounce in many parts as contradictory, the spirit of the kingdom which was of this world and the spirit of that kingdom which was not of this world—the spirit of a Joshua, a Samson, or an Elisha, with the spirit of a Peter, a John, or a Paul—or the spirit of Moses or David praying against the enemies of Israel with the spirit of that prayer of JESUS, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

With regard, however, to the Revelation and the Rule of Duty and the Standard of the Moral State, there would seem to be now less difficulty than of old in gaining a hearing for the principle of accommodation. But as it is desirable that such concession should not be involuntary, and considered as anomalous, but, if it may so be, rather should be seen to be a consistent part of a systematic

whole, it may be worth while to notice some other points of such accommodation which, if duly pondered on, may serve to produce something of this feeling of a coherent Providential plan.

XXIII.

Further remarks on the principle of Accommodation.

And first may it not be said, that the very phraseology which leads us to attribute such direct and special Revelation to many things which we find written in the Bible is itself an Accommodation? and cannot be taken in its letter, but must be taken only in its spirit? To take instances at once: Are not the phrases, 'The Lord said unto Moses,' and the 'Thus saith the Lord' of the Prophets, themselves accommodations? Do these expressions always mean that GOD spake audibly to Moses and the Prophets the words which we have written down? or do they not mean at most that the thoughts so expressed by Moses and the Prophets were suggested by GOD? Does any one believe—can they do so—that the minutiæ of the Levitical ordinances were spoken to Moses by a Divine voice? or that the words used by Ezekiel were heard by him, all as we have them, as heavenly utterances? Probably no one who thinks much of what is implied in such a supposition does so believe, but rather acquiesces in the belief of some of the wisest, of Jews as well as of Christians, that though such expressions do sometimes signify the directest Revelations ever given by GOD to man, yet that more often they rather signify a deep and true impression on the prophet's mind that what he was saying was assuredly in accordance with the Will of GOD—either a necessary filling in of a Divine outline, or a consequent application of an indisput-

ably Divine principle. And in order to judge adequately of this it would be well if we carefully compared all, or very many, of the passages in both Testaments in which the Divine agency is directly introduced in narration, and see whether or not we are not only allowed, but even compelled to modify the meaning of such expressions so much in some instances that we may perhaps do somewhat so in most. And when we begin to do this we cannot but be struck with the fact that in the earliest stages of Revelation GOD is represented as revealing Himself least frequently but most directly, and as there is progression in the importance of the truths revealed, so there is a corresponding retrogression in the directness of the method of Revelation. The earliest Revelations are represented as immediate manifestations of Divine Personality: the later as continually fainter and fainter manifestations of the same. From Adam to Moses it is for the most part JEHOVAH who is represented as appearing: from Moses to David it is almost exclusively The Angel of JEHOVAH; while after the time of David communications are made not by Angels but by Prophets, and to these chiefly in dreams and visions and types and symbols, until at length even such things cease; and some of the most important truths of which the Jews were in possession at the time of the Advent of our Lord, were educed into a prominence which they never had before, by yet more indirect means than these, or indeed than by any especial Revelations from Heaven.

And not only this, but sometimes when we compare one passage of Scripture with another, we find the same communication spoken of as given indifferently by JEHOVAH, by angels, and by men: and even in the New Testament we

find St. Stephen speaking of 'the angel who spake unto Moses in Mount Sinai,' and of the Law having been given by 'the disposition of angels:' and we find these substitutions of angelic ministrations for Divine manifestations repeated in the Epistles to the Galatians and the Hebrews. And elsewhere in the Old Testament we find many diverse, and it would seem contrary, operations ascribed to the special agency of GOD. GOD is said to have taught Bezaleel and Aholiab to work—to have moved Samson to slay the Philistines, and Jehu to slay many of his brethren, and the like repeatedly. In one place we read that the Lord moved David to number the people, while in another Satan is said to have done so too: and twice over it is said that 'JEHOVAH hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets;' and indeed there is scarcely any kind of action or event which is not directly referred in the Old Testament to the agency of GOD. Even in the New we find the same kind of freer and fuller ascription of Divine Influence than we can construe to the letter, as when John the Baptist is said to have been filled with the HOLY GHOST from his birth, and mere miraculous powers, unaccompanied by any spiritual graces, are said to be gifts of the HOLY GHOST. And surely when we find such peculiarities in the use of expressions which in their letter denote the introduction of the most direct agency where we should have expected but a modification of such expressions, and where we are obliged to consider them satisfied by more mediate manifestations of the Divine, we may be permitted, if not compelled, to interpret the 'Thus saith the Lord' of Moses and the Prophets with a vagueness which at first sight would not occur to us.

And then consider how Mosaic morality was in some points pronounced by our Lord Himself as an accommodation to the low spiritual state of those to whom it was delivered. And what can any worship by symbols be but an accommodation—the symbols professedly deriving their Divine significance largely from their human? And the localisation of Deity—the Shechinah and the Cherubim—the Urim and Thummim—the Brazen Serpent—the Ark and its Mercy-seat—the figures profusely graven and woven on the walls and the doors of the Tabernacle and the Temple, and even within the Holiest of all—what were these things but accommodations?

XXIV.

Our Lord's testimony as to the authority of the Jewish Scriptures.

The testimony of our Lord to the authority of the Jewish Scriptures yet remains to be considered. And it is at once and unreservedly declared that this testimony, as popularly interpreted, does present great appearance of sanction to some of the views which are discountenanced in these pages. Wherefore it is here desired to speak with the greatest self-distrust, and with the highest reverence for whatever may but seem to have even but a probability in favour of being in accordance with His will. For that will is in these pages emphatically recognised as the highest authority before which the mind of man can bow, and to which its every thought ought to be brought into obedience. And for those who after due deliberation have come to the conclusion that this high will requires only probably that we should receive the Jewish Scriptures as all throughout equally Divine, the question is at an end. But for those

not yet forced to that conclusion, these following considerations may have weight.

And first we ought to consider what it is that it is proposed to establish by this testimony of our Lord. It is not the general sacredness of the Jewish Scriptures—their inestimable worth to the Jew—their containing a Divine Law which was not to pass away without being fulfilled—or their being a Divine testimony to Himself as the Messiah—this is here admitted, and much more: and not admitted only, but emphatically asserted in these pages. The question then here is not concerning the substantial Divinity of the Jewish Scripture, or the general Divine commission of Moses and the Prophets, but only concerning the difference between this and their universal literal Infallibility: not concerning the reality of Divine Influence on the Scriptures, but concerning the degree of it. That the way of eternal life might be learned by the Jew from his Scriptures, and that those Scriptures which testify of CHRIST cannot be broken—there is not a moment's doubt: but that there is nothing else in these Scriptures but what is necessary to teach the way of eternal life, or to testify of CHRIST—this is doubted. And these points are distinctly separable. It may surely be believed that all Holy Scripture is profitable for the highest spiritual interests of man, without at the same time believing it obligatory to receive the books of Esther and of Canticles, which make no mention of the name of GOD, as a direct Revelation from heaven: or to believe that prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of old spake as they were moved by the HOLY GHOST, without also believing that the books of Joshua and of Judges and of Kings and of

Chronicles, which contain no prophecy, came not at all by the will of man, but wholly by the operation of the HOLY GHOST. Indeed all these admissions may be freely and fully made, and yet it be an open question whether some of the Psalms (one fourth of which at least are by unknown authors) are more than the outpourings of a soul under the ordinary influences of Hebrew life: or whether all the Proverbs, even of Solomon, are the utterances of Wisdom in its highest forms: or whether the Book of Job, which does not recognise the existence of Patriarch or of Prophet, of Abraham or of Moses, of Israelite or of Priest, is indubitably Divine.

Unquestionably our Lord paid great homage to the Old Testament as a whole, on various solemn occasions. The fact that He used the words of Scripture in His first temptation in the wilderness and in His last agony on the cross: and that before he commenced His public teaching and after He arose from the tomb, He expounded the Scriptures: and that with Him It is Written is often the conclusion of an argument, and Have you not read in the Scripture? is always a rebuke to an opponent—these things, and the like are, it is repeated, not only conceded but asserted in these pages. But this testimony does not decide, it is thought, the differential amount of sacredness between substantial Divinity and literal Infallibility, and though conclusive concerning the general question of the supreme authority of Scripture, leaves yet unclosed the special question herein discussed.

XXV.

Difference between substantial Divineness and literal Infallibility.

To establish this point conclusively would indeed seem to require more exact evidence, and more definite data, than we are privileged to possess. It would at least require that we should have before us the precise expressions of our Lord, and these used in judgments which directly determine whether indefinite sacredness or circumstantial infallibility ought to be attributed to the Jewish records. But we have no judgment of His which contemplates this distinction, and all the language ascribed to Him is of the popular form. In matters which pertain to questions with which the minds of those to whom our Lord's sayings were addressed were not conversant, and which depend for their decision upon differences of expression which it was not essential that they should receive, we cannot always be perfectly sure that in our present Gospels we have the very words originally uttered. Indeed probably in any of them we have but a translation of those words. They are all now in Greek, and our Lord appears to have spoken in Syro-Chaldaic—which is a fact of some consequence in such discussions as these with which we are now concerned. And not only this, but to assume that we have the most accurate possible translation of the words of our Lord, is to assume part of that which we have to prove. For it takes for granted not only the thorough truthfulness and entire historical worth of the Evangelists, but also that they are infallible verbally as well as substantially, which is a point which in strictness of argument ought to be first demonstrated on some independent ground before it is brought to decide something else. It must be remembered that none

of the Gospels have the character of an autobiography, or of any dictation by the great Object and Subject of them: but rather only of records of the impressions produced by Him, or only by reported accounts of Him in some cases, on the minds and memories and moral dispositions of men, differing considerably from each other, and certainly to some extent colouring their narratives with their own characters. And in the case of two of those Evangelists we do not know that they ever heard our Saviour speak, but we have reason rather to believe that they derived all their knowledge of His discourses from the report of others. And this is an important remark with regard to the present question: because some of the passages which give the strongest colouring to our Saviour's testimony in this case, occur in the Gospel of St. Luke.[1]

But admitting to the fullest extent that an evangelist is wholly trustworthy historically, it does not therefore follow necessarily that he may be so verbally and minutely accurate as to preserve those delicate shades of expression which would suffice to confirm or to confound the distinctions which we are here seeking to establish. And if we have not the very words of our Lord, we may be sure that the recorded words are (unconsciously) more favourable than otherwise to the side of a more direct Divine influence: for such doubtless was the natural prepossession of the writer, and of those from whom he received his accounts, and it would require the exertion of a strong deliberate restraint to prevent this from being the case. While these things however are considered as elements fairly to be taken into account in forming judgments concerning this matter, nothing further on this point shall be urged than

the exhortation to those who may be anxious for the exactest truth, to compare the differing accounts given by the different Evangelists of the same conversations of our Lord. A critical and obvious instance of literal inexactness in the Gospel narratives is the fact, that the words inscribed on the cross are recorded by each of the four Evangelists differently, which is clearly not to be accounted for by their being written in three different languages or letters. The variations, too, in the letter of the Lord's Prayer, and in the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper, are also notable, and the more so from the fact that they would seem so unlikely and so unnecessary.

It should, however, not fail to be noted that however this question may be determined, it cannot be decisive as to the authority of the whole Bible, inasmuch as it does not apply, at least directly, to the question of the significance of the Christian Scriptures. As it has been already said, there is no allusion known to have been made by our Lord to the future existence even of any such Scriptures: no promise given that any New Testament should be composed to correspond to, or complete, the Old: no faintest intimation that any Scripture should bear the same relation to the Christian Church that the Jewish Law did to the Mosaic polity. Every portion of Divine testimony to the authority and significance of the New Testament is of an indirect and inferential kind. Doubtless there may be considered as justly arising from the old dispensation an analogy and an expectation which may have weight in confirming that which rests on other and more definite grounds, but such kind of inference cannot be considered as of itself affording

a stable foundation for so wide-spreading a theory as that of an infallible and exclusive guide.

XXVI.

Our Lord recognises the Principle of Accommodation.

But the considerations which may be the most fairly judged as rendering the testimony of our Lord not conclusively contradictory to the opinions maintained in these pages, are derived from no superficial or incidental forms in which His teaching is presented to us, but from an attentive study of the very principles of that Teaching, and from His practical treatment of those Scriptures to which that Teaching refers.

The Teaching of our Lord itself distinctly recognises that Principle of Accommodation which is contended for with regard to the older Scriptures. It is most important that this should be distinctly seen and understood, not only for our immediate purpose, but also on other grounds; and therefore it shall here be dwelt upon for a while.

And surely there is every antecedent probability that such should be the case. The more fully we enter into the feeling of the pure Divinity of CHRIST the more we must feel the necessity (if we may so speak) of such Accommodation in His whole converse with men. Men could not have borne the things which He could have told them at any time, and they did not at one time bear the things which He taught them to bear at another. How emphatically does He Himself tell His disciples this, and thus give us in the plainest and directest terms the lesson which now it is wished to inculcate. How gradually did He unfold the mystery of His Person and His Mission, and how still more

gradually did His Apostles come to the recognition of it. Surely this fact lies on the very surface of the Evangelical History, and is a fact full of lessons. And if we would humble ourselves duly we should deem it but most fitting, and not at all a thing to be wondered at or disbelieved, that the bright Light which He was should be veiled before such dim eyes as ours, and that the purely Divine in Him should pass through a temporary medium of the simply human before it could be adjusted to the various capacities of our inferior nature. And we may also remember (though not for the soothing of our wounded pride) that those to whom our Lord first made His Revelations were even not such as we in many things. Our mental vision has been purified and strengthened by that very light which at its first diffusion was too strong for any eye: and that light which then was brighter than the noonday sun, and blinded before it illumined, has now become but as the healing light of Day to the eyes which have been opened upon it after the Church's enjoyment of it for eighteen hundred years.

To the mere hasty speculator indeed it might seem the wisest, that all of a Final Revelation should be unmixed Truth, absolute and universal: that if progressive it should be pure, and that if indirect it should be infallible: that its morality should be inflexible, its dogmas indisputable, and its whole character so marked off from all that is human and imperfect that its limits should never be fairly open to mistake, and its authority never for a moment be possible to be questioned. But let any one not in haste ponder well on the complexity of the problem of how Divine Ideas are to be completely and at once revealed through the medium of an ancient anomalous language—how many new Truths

are to be promulgated fully and finally in one generation, and how a Religion intended to be ever the same in essence is yet to be adapted to the ever-varying diversities of humanity. And this was the Problem (if we may speak thus humanly with due reverence) which a final Revelation had to solve. It had to make itself immediately influential in the world, and also universally applicable unto the end of all things. And therefore it must be both adapted to its first hearers in the modes of its expression, and at the same time be capable of being translated into other modes: and consequently be a revelation of Principles rather than of Rules: flexible exceedingly in the letter, and unchangeable only in its spirit. It must therefore too use, for the most part, existing instruments of communication: it must link itself on at many points with the actual condition of the age in which it is delivered, and only refuse any participation with its imperfections when they are such as are essentially opposed to its spirit and its aim. At least without some such connections with the modes of thought prevalent in the age in which it was first promulgated, it would seem almost impossible to conceive how it could have taken such hold of the minds of the first generation as to have been transmitted with effect to that which succeeded. Unquestionably the popular nature of the language in which it was first conveyed, made the ethereal truths which were its essence far more impressive on its first recipients. The truths would have been, it may be, more adequately expressed for the highest subsequent culture of mankind in other and purer language, but their effect on the great uncultivated multitude whom they were to be the great means of purifying and elevating, either in the first age or in any following one

would not have been so great if they had been originally conveyed in a vehicle more colourless, and tasteless, and insipid in proportion as it was more pure. It is true that by this means the records of such communications must almost necessarily present to after times more difficulties of interpretation than might have attended less accommodated Revelations: and there must by this means be devolved upon later times a growing labour to separate between the transient and the permanent—between the earthly and unessential form and the heavenly and immutable spirit: but difficulty and labour are our lot on earth, and the only way of dealing with them wisely is to embrace them cheerfully—not to rebel or even to murmur and sit still, but to encounter them thoughtfully and faithfully, patiently and earnestly, and thus through conquering them to convert them into means of self-culture. It may be even that the effort and the trial which this task imposes may be precisely that which is most needed by us to counteract some of the evil effects by which our superabounding luxury of privilege is almost sure to be always attended.

The evils and errors indeed which have arisen from man's dealings with the record we actually possess, in consequence very probably of his not sufficiently understanding this peculiarity of its accommodative character, have been great: but they need not ever be so. Many, if not most, of them have been the mere consequences of human wilfulness and ignorance, which greater dispassionateness and a more intelligent method of interpretation may teach us to avoid for the future: and never have the efforts which are necessary to disengage the spirit from the encumbrances of the letter, and to reconcile the natural

progress and expansion of human thought with reverence for those principles which the Scriptures emphatically reveal, been made with more of sincerity and of hopefulness than at present.

XXVII.

Principle of Accommodation apparent in our Lord's whole life and teaching.

The instances in our Lord's own conduct and teaching which distinctly recognise the principle of accommodation, it would be well for us to consider, not only for our present purpose, which they largely illustrate, but also because we may hence see wisdom in many of our Lord's ways of acting and speaking which otherwise will remain obscure to us. The great principle and fact which it is here wished to call attention to is this: Our Lord did and said some things, and suffered many things to be done and said, that were not absolutely and universally the best, in order that His life and words might connect themselves with previous facts in Scripture and certain prepossessions in the minds of those among whom He lived, so that there might be no abrupt line of separation between the Divine dispensations, but that they might join on to each other without a shock, and constitute one great scheme gradually unfolding itself from Law into Gospel. And to special instances of such condescending adaptation we should come after calm meditation on the earliest period of His life, and on all that which preceded His public baptism—a period of most mysterious being, which it must often confuse the clearest mind to conceive of or comprehend. And that baptism itself, what was it but the most illustrious of all special instances of that accommodation of which we are speaking? How can it possibly be interpreted in a manner which shall

not make its significance depend upon a temporary adaptation to human infirmities of thought and feeling? And the words which JESUS then spoke in answer to the instincts of the unadaptive Baptist, are they not words which may well serve as a key to many parts of His future ministry, and as a sanction for all that is here contended for—'Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.' And His Temptation—or at least the history we have of it—is not this too an instance of accommodation, which might have led us to anticipate, and which ought now to lead us to understand, that His ways may not be always only as our ways? And why did our Lord for so long declare so little plainly who He was, and what was the significance of His mission? Why did He often even forbid His disciples to proclaim their own faith in Him? Why did He so repeatedly and so strictly charge those whom He cured miraculously to make no mention of Him? Why did He live so much in Galilee, so little in Jerusalem? Surely these things, and such as these, were accommodations of His own history to the state of Jewish prejudice, and that, too, of large significance.

And as He thus continually adapted the manifestations of Himself to the existing state of imperfection amid which He came—frequently withdrawing Himself from opposition instead of overcoming it, and forbidding sometimes the proclamation of that which at other times He represented as an essential that all men should know—so He seems to have refrained from directly correcting every detail of misconception which came before Him, and in some instances to have accommodated His expressions or arguments to modes of thought which His own Revelations

must eventually avail to abolish. For instances: He did not ever expressly reveal the Levitical Law, but sanctioned it by His own practice, though for Him it could have no significance. Was not this an accommodation? He conformed to customs respecting the worship of GOD which had no authority in the Hebrew Scriptures, and observed some ceremonies of Jewish practice which were contrary to its provisions. And did He not accommodate Himself to Jewish modes of argument (which we can but deem not absolutely the best) in that remarkable conversation with the Jews, in Solomon's Porch at the Feast of the Dedication? And how otherwise can we understand our Lord's words and deeds concerning unclean spirits? Must we not suppose that all these things were in accordance with that notable use of popular and even proverbial sayings which we find so frequent, and with that characteristic teaching of His in Parables in which the general significance alone is true, and the details, if construed without acknowledgment of the principle of accommodation, would convey a meaning which would not be true?

Surely in place of striving to explain away such peculiarities or ignoring them, because they look contradictory to our expectations, it would be more humble and more wise to see whether we cannot recognise in them thoughts larger than our thoughts. Consider it which way we will, we never can get rid of the fact that multiplied minor imperfections and adaptations must eventually be involved in that one great fundamental accommodation of employing human language as the instrument of Divine Revelation. And in the case of our Lord this accommodation was even greater than it might have been. For He did not com-

monly use that language which was the most perfect of all human languages, and the one into which ultimately His sayings have been translated by His disciples and have come down to us: but one of the least considerable dialects of the civilised speech of man—the Syro-Chaldaic, as it has been said. Might not such an extent of accommodation as this be purposely employed in order to withdraw us from our natural tendency to depend upon the letter, by at once denying us any knowledge of what that mere letter actually was? But also it should be borne in mind, that our Lord Himself ever represented His Revelation of Himself as a limited one, and His mission, though of universal virtue, as yet not of immediately universal operation. And in accordance with this, our Lord did not represent Himself as correcting all errors of belief, though he did correct many, or as reforming all abuses of practice, though His driving the buyers and the sellers out of the Temple was a conspicuous instance of what He might have done in this respect if such had been His mission. For the most part He destroyed subordinate errors by simply proclaiming germinant truths: distilling healing virtue into bitter waters—inserting heavenly leaven into the corrupt mass—and then leaving the Divine to work its effect only gradually on the human. And thus in speaking of those subjects as to which there were already prevalent large theories among the Jews—especially of those which divided Pharisee and Sadducee—in proportion as they were at once regarded as of sacred importance by them and of subordinate importance by Him—He allowed His language to differ as little as might be from the popular. Had He not done thus, He must have differed in almost every utterance

from the forms of expression which were used by those with whom He conversed: and had this been the case, then judging from what we see to have occurred under the actual circumstances of other parts of the history, we cannot but believe that attention would have been so much drawn to subordinate questions, and objections and cavils so multiplied, as would have more than overbalanced the advantages of the truest teaching, and have materially impaired the leading objects of His ministry. And in thus consulting the immediate interests, by condescending to the confirmed infirmities, of those whom He personally addressed, no necessary injury was caused to future generations of His disciples; for whatever was not the truest concerning such matters would both not be prejudicial while it remained and would surely fall off in time, and they would be gifted with other advantages of interpretation which contemporaries had not, and all the fuller light of Apostolic teaching and a completed Scripture.

XXVIII.

Testimony of our Lord with respect to the Law.

Our Lord's words, too, in respect of some portions of the Old Testament—even of the Law itself, which was ever considered the most sacred portion of it—can scarcely be said to ascribe to it the highest possible authority. He speaks of it surely in a way which renders it not possible for us to substitute for the Law of Moses the voice of GOD. Consider well those words of His which He spake under the very shadow of the Temple,—'Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law; Moses gave unto you circumcision (not that it is of Moses, but of

the fathers), and ye on the Sabbath day circumcise a man that the law of Moses should not be broken. Are ye angry at Me because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day? Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.' Now does not the force of the argument here lie in the implicit assertion, A greater than Moses is here? And do not those sayings in the Sermon on the Mount afford a like striking contrast between the authority of Moses and of CHRIST—those of the form, 'Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time—but I say unto you.' Surely the pure utterances of GOD do not repeal each other. And reflect steadily on those other words recorded by St. Matthew: 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.' Did these words stand alone they would be sufficient to prove what it is here wished to suggest. But they do not stand alone. They are accompanied by various practical comments. At various stages of His ministry we are furnished with instances in which He treated portions of the law as of subordinate importance when compared with only the bodily benefit of man. The instances in which our Lord appeals to the conduct of David in eating the shewbread, as a sufficient precedent for setting aside a prescript of the law, is of singular significance in this matter. And the systematic and prominent manner in which our Lord not only vindicated for His disciples, and for all men, a freedom from the old Mosaic strictness in the observance of the Sabbath, but even

reduces one of the Ten Commandments written with the finger of GOD on stone to a position of inferiority with respect to all the others—this is surely a demonstration that the highest claims of the older law are not to be put into competition with that dispensation of the Spirit which had now come through Him.

XXIX.

Quotations from the Scriptures made by our Lord.

The manner too in which our Lord practically treats the words of the Old Testament in quoting them for the instruction of His disciples, confirms this view. But on this point it shall only here be said that, so far as we have the means of judging from the records of the Evangelists, our Lord did not generally use the words of the Hebrew Scriptures, but most frequently used, and therefore sanctioned by His use, the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures by the Seventy—a translation which is one of the least literally faithful of all the translations of the Bible in existence. It has no evidence in itself of there being anything specially Divine about it. It is not certainly known by whom, or when, this translation was made: different portions of it probably being translated at different times and by different persons. It differs from the original Hebrew to an extent of which the following are instances: In the Pentateuch it follows the Samaritan in preference to the Hebrew in more than a thousand places, and in the book of Job there are between seven and eight hundred members of sentences omitted in the translation which exist in the Hebrew: In many hundreds of places it is a paraphrase rather than a translation, and the version of the book of Daniel has been

generally considered so erroneous that another has, by almost universal consent, been inserted in its place. To this translation the Jews of our Lord's time attached great reverence, and our Lord did not protest against or correct it, but used it without protest or correction : and it is quoted throughout the New Testament far more frequently than any other translation of the original Hebrew. And not only this, but there is not the slightest difference between the formulas with which quotations from the Seventy (and these the most inaccurate), and those which seem original translations from the Hebrew, are introduced. All that is said by our Lord concerning the sacredness of the Old Testament is said concerning these imperfect representations of its words, and therefore to reconcile this language with truth we must give latitude of significance either to the testimony, or to that which is testified to.

XXX.

Principle of Accommodation apparent in the Teaching of the Apostles.

The Teaching and Practice of the Apostles, too, were in conformity with those of our Lord Himself.

There is a difference, however, between the teaching of JESUS and that of His Apostles, as well as between their practice, which it is necessary at once to notice. A voice from heaven attesting personal perfection—faultlessness of mind and character—fell only upon CHRIST : and we may hear none as we hear Him. And our Lord everywhere exhibited a form of truth unmodified by individuality—only modified at all for His disciples' sake, and to meet the infirmities of the minds of those whom He wished to instruct. When our Lord condescends to use the language

of those to whom He speaks, we ever feel that it is condescension, and that His meaning is much higher and deeper than His words: that He utters not all things as they are to Him, but only as they need to be for them: that in Him is the water of life, pure and colourless as light—instinct with spirit—and that when it is given forth otherwise, it is only that it may be better suited to the receptive powers of those who were both weak and sick. But in the case of the Apostles, we see that their teaching is tinctured throughout with their own individualities, and we feel that we are drinking the living water only out of earthen vessels. Clearly no apostle knew all truth. The verbal promise that they should do so must obviously be restricted to all truth necessary for their own and for the Church's edification: just as we see that the other promise that they should be shown things to come did often not include the things of to-morrow, and never anything which should happen to themselves. They were sufficiently instructed to instruct us sufficiently, and in all things were most earnest and affectionate and truthful disciples of the one only Master: but they were perhaps assisted in their teaching only as we may be in our learning: and indeed it might be said, that they will only present us with an adequate revelation of their Divine Master's mind, when the HOLY GHOST shall enable us to reconstruct, each of us for ourselves, an image of CHRIST made up out of the various representations that they have given us of Him. The light of the knowledge of the glory of CHRIST has been transmitted to us only through media tinged with individual peculiarities of character—the personal endowments and attainments, and phases of spiritual life, of each apostle

and evangelist leaving a mark upon the truth as it passes through their minds. Who does not feel how different James is from John, and how different John is from Peter, and how still more different Paul is from all, and how their characters as they are known to us from their histories are reflected in their writings? The human element in the writings of the Apostles will be denied by none but those whose eyes are spiritually dim, and ought very carefully to be studied by all those of a single eye who would cherish to greater brightness the light that is in them. In such case a high wisdom would be more and more recognised in what to others will remain unintelligible, and there will arise at once both pleasure and gratitude at discovering fresh proofs of that condescending accommodation elsewhere so often apparent, by which the writers of the New Testament were so providentially selected that each considerable class of minds, both of their time and of all time, have found themselves, as it were, consulted and represented in their writings.

The case of St. Paul, as exhibited by himself, most emphatically in many ways shows us that he knew of no claim to universal and literal infallibility, for himself or for others. He more than once distinctly recognises in words a generic difference between his teaching and that of his Master: and the whole tenor and manner of his writings throughout show that he always felt it deeply. He never silences false teachers by the mere assertion of his infallible authority, but almost invariably only attempts to do so by argument and persuasion, and by comparison of the spiritual worth of his teaching with that of theirs.

And consider how St. Paul deals with his fellow-labourers

and speaks of them, and whether such conduct or such speech could consist with any view of their universal infallibility. Paul withstood Peter to the face not on account of any merely moral blameworthiness, but on account of his conforming to what he thought unjustifiable Jewish doctrinal prejudice: and he says of certain other Apostles, even of the chiefest, 'whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me.'

And how could the principle of accommodation be more directly professed, and more plainly sanctioned, than by such words as these of Paul's, 'To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews . . . . to them that are without law, as without law, that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some'? or what words can be more largely significant in this great question than those which he used to the men of Athens when, expounding GOD's general dealings with His creatures, he said, 'The times of this ignorance GOD winked at'?

XXXI.

Differences and coincidences in the New Testament.

But the most remarkable evidence with regard to this subject, and that which of itself seems conclusive to many minds, is that afforded by the Differences and Coincidences of the Evangelists. No one can have failed to remark some of the more obvious of these; but the more careful our investigation, the more notable become the facts presented to us. A mere cursory view will show us that in Matthew's Gospel much is accommodated to the Jewish

mind: in Luke's much to the Gentile: while Mark's would seem little more than a composition from the two. But the most obvious and striking peculiarity is seen in John's Gospel, when it is compared and contrasted with the coincidences between the other three. It is then seen to have not merely a greater degree of the same kind of difference which exists between them—mere discrepancies of detail and slight accommodations—but a difference of tone and complexion given to many actions and sayings of JESUS—quite another scene of action, and a characteristically different method of discourse: the three omitting the most surprising doctrines which John expounds, and John omitting the most surprising facts which they record. These things alone suggest to us that any one of the Evangelists presents us with but a partial and peculiar view of the character and teaching of Him who was confessedly immeasurably more than all of truth and love which they could comprehend or reproduce. And when we pursue this subject with any degree of care, we soon find other facts which render more impressive this view of the Gospels. Let us place some of them more distinctly before us.

The first three Gospels confine themselves principally, though not quite exclusively, to our Lord's ministry in Galilee: they speak only of one, or perhaps two, visits of His to Jerusalem, and generally give a reason for His leaving Galilee whenever they narrate His doing so. They represent JESUS chiefly as going about doing good, casting out demons frequently, and preaching publicly much. The subjects of His preaching are principally things moral and temporal, present and preceptive: and the method of it is very characteristically a speaking in parables. In these

Gospels, the kingdom of heaven or of GOD is a characteristic expression and one of very frequent occurrence, while there is no mention either of the Word or of the Paraclete. They simply describe or relate facts and sayings without any apparent object beyond the individual worth of each; seeming to have no special aim in their narrations towards which all the parts continually tend, save indeed that very general one of exhibiting JESUS to the adoration of all, as at once the Son of GOD and the Son of Man, the Messiah of the Jews and the Saviour of mankind.

St. John's Gospel confines itself principally, though not quite exclusively, to our Lord's ministry in Jerusalem and its neighbourhood: it speaks of JESUS being at several of the annual feasts there, and generally gives a reason for His leaving Jerusalem whenever it narrates His doing so. It represents JESUS chiefly in His intercourse with His disciples, never once as casting out demons, and preaching publicly but little. The subjects of His preaching are generally things unseen and eternal—the significance of His mission and His relation to mankind—and never once is He represented as speaking to the multitude in parables. In this Gospel, the expression of the kingdom of heaven or of GOD never once occurs, while those of the Word and the Paraclete occur in it so often as to be quite characteristic of it. St. John's Gospel professedly has a particular object in view, and all its parts seem designed to subserve this one leading aim. It is indeed all of one tone throughout—so much coloured by John's peculiar modes of thought and expression that we can at once distinguish any detached passage from John's Gospel from a passage from any of the others, and cannot sometimes distinguish in a series of

connected passages, which are the Evangelist's words, and which are the words of JESUS.

And finally: St. John's Gospel does not seem to be either complete in itself, or simply supplementary to the others. It records what the others record, as well as omits what they record. It gives quite a different view of the same fact or discourse—as for instances, of the ministry of John the Baptist, and of the Last Supper of the Lord. It seldom quotes Scripture, but when it does, the quotations are generally quite different, or differently applied, from those of the three. It does not dwell much on miracles as evidence of power, but rather as illustrative of character or introductory to discourse: and seems to set forth JESUS, not so prominently as being the Messiah of the Jews, as being the Incarnation of the Eternal Word, the Ideal of the human and the Divine, and of the union of the two.

And yet further, there are other facts connected with the constitution of the first three Gospels which ought to be borne in mind, both in reference to this present subject and to several others, and as particularly valuable always as affording a check to that tendency which is so prevalent and so prejudicial in all such matters as those with which these pages are conversant, namely, the tendency to pronounce beforehand what must be. Consider then these following points of coincidence between the first three. There are sixty-five passages which are common to all the three: twenty-three which are common to Matthew and Mark: thirty-nine which are common to Matthew and Luke: and eighteen which are common to Mark and Luke. And again, while there are forty-two passages in Luke's Gospel

which have no parallels in either of the other two, there are only thirty-three in Matthew's, and only seven in Mark's, which have not such parallels.

With such facts before us we cannot but consider a close connection between these three Gospels as indisputable: but the nature and extent of it is at present inexplicable historically. A very simple conjectural solution might doubtless be found, either in the assumption of an Aramaic original, or in a cycle of oral traditions: but neither of such solutions would be completely satisfactory or sufficient; either might do much towards accounting for the coincidences, but neither would do much towards accounting for the differences.

And it is also notable that in respect of quotations from the Old Testament, the facts presented to us by these Gospels increase our difficulties. For while Matthew quotes often from the Hebrew (or perhaps rather corrects the Seventy from the Hebrew), and does so more accurately than the others, Luke quotes invariably from the Seventy, and less often literally than otherwise: yet the quotations of all the three often harmonise with each other where they do not harmonise either with the Hebrew or with the Seventy; and generally the instances of abridgment and composition of quotations coincide in all.

XXXII.

Quotations from the Old Testament in the New.

Indeed this subject of Quotations from the Old Testament is one which it would be for the advantage of any one to pursue who is anxious to form a just judgment in this matter of the degree of sacredness which is practically

attached in the New Testament to the mere letter of the Holy Scripture. It is one the details of which it is wholly without the plan of these pages to deal with: but at the same time it may not be irrelevant to state the kind of results which the examination here recommended is likely to produce for any able and open mind. Such results are of this kind. We find, That the writers of the New Testament never quote the original words of the Old Testament, every quotation being a translation. That this translation is more often taken from that of the Seventy, than made by themselves from the Hebrew accurately: That this inaccurate translation of the Seventy they do not always quote accurately where it happens to be so: That many of their quotations do not agree substantially either with the Hebrew or the Seventy: That the different writers quote the same passage from the Old Testament differently, sometimes not one of them agreeing verbally with either the Hebrew or the Seventy: and that passages are apparently quoted from the Old Testament which are not now to be found there.

And the applications of the quotations are often as notable in this respect as the mode in which they are made. They assuredly indicate a freer mode of using Scripture than will accord with any assumption of the special sacredness of its words. There are hundreds of instances in the New Testament where the Old Testament is made use of for purposes for which (if we may decide anything in such matters) we may decide that it could not have been originally written.

Most inconsiderable, it is admitted, are such facts as these to those whose theory of Divine influence in the

composition of the Scriptures is at all expansive: but it must be repeated that they are not inconsiderable to those whose theory is rigidly literal. No open mind can but infer from such facts as these (and there are more of a like kind) that the precise words of Scripture cannot be of so much importance as they would have been had they been the very dictations of the Almighty. Does not the lawfulness of a translation depend really upon the implied admission that they are not such as these would be? or at least that the substance of Revelation is not dependent upon any inflexible forms of expression, but that the essence of it can be transfused into any speech of man? yea, even that whatever modes of utterance can avail to express the wants of the human heart can also avail to render intelligible the Divine provisions for their supply? If the Bible be the Words, as well as the Word, of GOD, these words must be absolutely the best: and therefore can it be lawful to translate these words into others, and in so translating them to alter them so much as we see to have been so often the case? But is it not the fact that the Scriptures, both Jewish and Christian, have been almost exclusively known to mankind, not through their original tongues, but through most imperfect, and wholly human, translations of them? But if by these considerations we are deprived of one kind of support, are we not furnished by them with others instead? In the case of the differences of the Gospels, for instance, by all their varieties of narration are we not only the more deeply and distinctly impressed with the profound spiritual unity which pervades them all—an unity constituted by the character of JESUS and the spirit of His doctrine? Do they not show us

plainly how immeasurably more He was than any four could portray, and how the exuberance of His grace and truth would require more books than the world would receive to embody and express it all? And with regard to the quotations of the Old Testament in the New, do we not gain more by the naturalness of the present mode than we should by the supernaturalness of one more rigid and more literal? This naturalness often affords us at once a confirmation and an explanation of the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles. We see how the very minuter shades of quotation vary with the circumstances of the persons writing and of the persons written to, and how adaptations were made to suit the differing positions in which Hebrew and heathen minds stood towards the Old Testament.

And surely that the whole tone of thought and expression of the evangelical writings should be, as it were unconsciously, moulded on Old Testament forms, as they both so conspicuously and so implicitly are, is exactly what we should expect to be the case, when we consider that the Old Testament and the Apocrypha (with the Rabbinic comments) were the whole of the literature with which a Jew was permitted to be conversant. Every cultivated Jew, however, was familiar with the sacred books from his youth: and thus living amongst those who were as familiar with them, and them alone, as himself, and ever accustomed to appeal to them, and to hear them appealed to, as the ultimate judge of all controversies in opinion or in practice, he became completely imbued with their peculiar savour: the words of Scripture came to him almost involuntarily, and seemed to furnish him with the most fitting forms

of expression for even the most common thoughts: and so entirely must his mind have been prepossessed by them, that it could only be by continual constraint and contradiction of his impulses that he could avoid appropriating and adapting the words of Scripture as his own. We ought also to remember, that the Old Testament Scriptures were the records at once of the religion and the law of the nation, and the only code and standard of national and social organisation, as well as the complete Encyclopædia of Jewish literature. And after all, perhaps the greatest object intended and effected by the manifold quotations of the Old Testament in the New, is the binding both into one providential whole: the demonstration that the New is but the completion and realisation of the ground-plan of the Old, and that no jot nor tittle of its prophetic scheme has been made to pass away without being fulfilled. And if this be so, then the recognition that a felicitous religious tact has always so guided the writers of the New Testament as that when they have failed in the universal literal expositions of the elder Scripture, they have always comprehended its spirit and found for it a legitimate application, will ever be sufficient to satisfy every real need of our reverent expectation.

XXXIII.

Objections to the views of Revelation here advocated.

To all such considerations—here purposely rather indicated than enforced—it is almost impossible but that there should be the instinct to object on the part of many, especially of those who have not long been engaged in Biblical studies of the higher kind. And the first form of

their objection will probably be, that such principles, by admitting so much of Holy Scripture to be of indefinite authority and significance, undermine all certainty, if they do not destroy all confidence, in interpretation, and consequently diminish very greatly the benefit and the comfort, connected with a written Revelation.

Now concerning such remarks it may first be said, that the principles of these pages have at least been simply deductions from the facts presented by the Revelation which we have, and not deductions from any assumptions of what we think ought to be, or must be: and that whatever theory be adopted, it ought to be framed on this method, and ought to be reconcilable with these facts, and one might say, ought to interpret them. But no rigid theory hitherto promulgated is reconcilable with these facts, or does interpret them. Some degree of departure from inflexible infallibility has always been practically made, and is now making more and more in the later theories. The question really has become one relating only to the degree of departure which is permissible. This ought to be especially noted, as it has been already said, for this lies at the root of all discussion of these matters now. The concession of fallibility in the minutest particular, or the admission of anything whatever being unessential in Revelation—this is the great concession, and that which contains within it the germs of all the danger that may lie in the theories which are fairly constructed on it as a base. For who is to determine the degree of the fallibility—the limit of the unessential? this is the question always pressing, but most pressing now. The Scriptures do not give us any rule by which thus to judge themselves. They do not define

the degree of Divine influence which has been exerted upon them, either as a whole, or in their various parts: nor do they point out the limits of those human elements which have been allowed to mingle themselves with the Divine. They do not even recognise their own existence as a whole: the Old Testament makes no mention of itself as a whole, nor does the New Testament make mention of itself at all—either as a whole or in part.

And as has already been remarked, the whole process of constituting the Christian Scriptures into a Canon of Truth and Duty was apparently a human work, the effect of Christian tact merely, not at all of what is ordinarily termed Divine Revelation. But is there any external authority vouchsafed to us which may be supplementary and co-equal with that of the Scriptures, determining that which they have left undetermined? Those to whom alone these pages are addressed are supposed to be unanimous in answering that there is not. The question then of the degree of Divine influence which has controlled the composition of the sacred Scriptures, and indeed all those other great questions which relate to their interpretation, are necessarily referred to private judgment. And as to this tribunal, which in these later centuries has for so many been found capable of deciding, with approximate truth, some of the greatest questions which can possibly occupy the human mind, we are absolutely obliged by the providence of GOD to have recourse on other occasions, we may do so on this with the faith, that if we consult it without a bribe either of fear or of prejudice, we shall receive a sentence which will authenticate itself as equitable and true. Truly that sound mind which is a promised Christian grace, and such scholarship

as is now within the reach of many, with conscience and common sense, can do great things: and the same faculties which suffice for translating the Scriptures out of their own dead languages into our living ones, and for expounding them with spirituality and intelligence, may very conceivably suffice for the decision of all the questions relating to them on which GOD will cause the safety or the salvation of any of His children to depend.

XXXIV.

The craving for an external standard of infallibility.

The tendency, however, which there is, and ever has been, among mankind to desire, and to set up, some external standard or instrument of infallibility, by means of which truth may be sought and found, as it were mechanically, and thus all mental and moral struggle be avoided, and religion be reduced to obedience—this is the real root of all over-measure of belief with regard to the literal infallibility of the Holy Scriptures. Most men are ever looking out of themselves, but not above, for strength; leaning, and loving to lean, on any arm (not invisible) that they think may support them without their own constant effort, on what they feel to be the most rugged of all ways —the way of thought. They are quite willing to gather themselves up to make one great exercise of faith—the choosing of their guide—but having once chosen this, they desire and decide that all else shall be included in this choice. Indeed it is very noticeable how much easier any amount of this kind of obedience is to many than any seemingly small burden of doubt. As in other departments of the religious life it is the commonest phenomenon that

men will more readily perform the most painful acts than cultivate the most elementary graces: so also in this we as often see that men can far more easily be made to subjugate, or even to sacrifice, their understanding than to exercise it. To walk by sight, in fact, and not by faith, this is the universal craving of the natural man. And with this disposition the notion of an infallible literal rule to believe by, entirely concurs, and is therefore clung to so closely, and parted from so reluctantly, by so many; and this notion it is which supplies many with a substitute for their surrender of allegiance to that grand claim of perpetual infallibility which the greatest Church of Christendom asserts to be its rightful and exclusive inheritance. Verily there is no harder task—no more intolerable burden—for many, than the responsibility of choice—the necessity of thought—in matters of religion. The most fearful of all afflictions to such is doubt, and the most welcome of all friends is an authoritative guide. But are these the worthiest, and is this state of mind to be commended? Is it a disposition befitting spiritual manhood? Is it not characteristically childish? or rather not even this, for the unconsciousness and instinctive self-surrender of childhood are wanting here, and there is nothing but the tremor of its weakness. Such a state as this is never encouraged, but frequently rebuked in the Gospel. Individual veracity, honesty, effort—opinions formed by our own investigations, or at least based upon our own intelligent convictions—not derived from forcible external imposition, or passively received without being assimilated to our own needs—to these are we now called by every voice which is capable of a spiritual signification. And the possession of an

infallible guide or standard, in proportion as it should be capable of being readily used by man, would tend to destroy this condition of exercise, and this sense of responsibility, in one large domain of our being, that of our intellect, and thus very materially abridge that great process of education which GOD has ordained for us on earth. If doubt were impossible in this region, we should lose very much of our discipline of faith, and our walk on earth would be altogether changed. One very prominent aim of the Gospel is to cultivate those very faculties which the gift of an infallible external authority would repress: and GOD now offers, instead of such authority, to give us light from within to read the outwardly obscure, and spiritual power to discern and to separate between the things that are universally good, and those which are so only temporarily and incidentally.

Our lot here on earth is one of great dignity because one of great difficulty and capacity: and we may not put off at will its high prerogatives because we feel reluctant to undergo its toils. In a condition of probation for the prize of immortality, we have no choice but to wrestle or to run: and He who is the Author and Finisher of our faith would have us, while we do so, ever look unto Him, and to none else. In our striving after perfection we must struggle ever with imperfection, and we must get spiritual guidance and strength by perpetual personal application to the invisible Saviour of our souls, and not chiefly by resort to any visible guide, however sacred, or by the intervention of any human agency, however reverend. And it may be for the very purpose of stimulating us to this ever fresh effort, that the written Revelations which GOD has given us

should have associated with them many human elements—that we should have in spiritual things as much labour in extracting purely that which is most profitable, as we have in separating the gold from its ore: and therefore, if this be so, we should take especial heed, lest by any wilful prepossessions we should, by mistaking the nature, lose the benefit, of our discipline.

But however this may be, and wish for it as we will, there seems no prospect of attaining to any other state on earth than that of fallibility. While we live in the flesh we live under the condition of a nature which forbids the spiritual becoming visible. Concerning the unseen there is no device of man which can preclude the possibility of doubt. There can be no government of man wholly by rule, and there can be no law which does not admit of a doubt in its application. This has been man's lot from the first, and there is no exemption from this noble but painful position promised even in that Revelation which is the last we may look for on earth.

XXXV.

Revelation not imperilled by honest and reverent criticism.

Doubtless on these principles there is large room for error, and it may be said very forcibly, that if there be this uncertainty about what is special Revelation and what may not be—if this passage be considered an accommodation and that an interpolation—then the whole Bible may be explained away, and the oracles of GOD be rendered as enigmatical as the oracles of man: there is really then nothing fixed in the Scriptures for faith to lay hold of—no rule to mark off the human from the Divine, and

therefore all that repose of soul which has ever been the portion of the believer in the Bible as the pure truth of GOD is done away.

Now to such language as this it is replied, what is said is not wholly unjust in its letter, but it is very far from being true in its spirit. Doubtless the whole Bible may be explained away professedly on these principles, as it is practically by some on every other system of principles. All folly and all wickedness is probably possible to man: and certainly a disingenuous spirit generates both with a fearful rapidity. There can be no cure for this but the conversion of a dishonest mind into an honest one. But here the question is, as has been said from the first emphatically and unequivocally, only with minds which are both honest and earnest—minds to which truth is a necessity and conscience a law: and that such as these must nullify the essential Revelations of the Bible because they do not receive the infallibility of every letter of it, is a consequence which is not obvious to many, and is not credible to some. Such a supposition proceeds on the assumption that the greatest truths with which the mind of man can be conversant are dependent on the uncorrupted preservation, as well as original Divine dictation, of a mass of documents of extreme antiquity, and all written in languages no longer spoken on earth; and that such truths cannot be sufficiently influential unless they be absolutely pure; which assumptions are matters neither of Christian faith nor of rational demonstration, and may more probably than otherwise be not unwisely or unsafely supplanted in our minds by their opposites. For really can this magnifying of the letter and diminishing of the spirit—this sanctifying of the

instrument—this consecration of the husk—be something superior in spirituality? Are the Tables of stone the only sufficient authorities for the Law, or the imagery of the Prophets the only vehicle of a Thus saith the Lord? Were the garments of the CHRIST as sacred as His Person, and His very vesture Divine? And how can it magnify the mercy of GOD, or consist with the privileges of a last Dispensation, that our position in this life, and our destiny in the next, should be made dependent upon the accuracy of the letter of documents which reach back three thousand years and more, and over whose composition there is no indisputable evidence of an exclusively Divine Influence, and for whose preservation there has not certainly been vouchsafed any known superhuman safeguard? It could not but be considered such a measure of hard dealing, and so unlike the general tone and character of the dispensation under which we live, to make our greatest hopes depend on such matters, that we must require the most positive assertions from heaven that such is indeed the case, before we can reverently bow beneath our lot.

The Divine origin either of Judaism or of Christianity can scarcely be dependent not merely upon the sacredness of every book in the first established Canon, but upon the Divinity of every sentence or sentiment, of every fact or date, which are to be found in them at this day. One cannot indeed but think that the Divinity of the book of Job may be reasonably separable from that of Judaism, and the Divinity of the book of Jude from that of Christianity; but surely we can scarcely hesitate to believe that no essential of Jewish faith would be compromised by doubting the Divine dictation of the Proverbs of Agur, or

of those of the mother of King Lemuel: nor any serious loss be necessarily incurred to the Christian if he cannot receive as wholly infallible the genealogies of Matthew or of Luke, or as a special Revelation the assertion of Michael contending for the body of Moses. Extreme instances, it is admitted, but pertinent, and sufficient for the purpose of showing what it is wished much to enforce, that the question here is, and can be, but one of degree, and that if the reasonings of the literalists were consistently carried out they would lead to the imposition of a yoke which thoughtful men, and their children, will probably find themselves less and less able to bear. And would that it were felt by all most deeply, that it is a most unfair and unwise alternative to reduce a man to, either to acknowledge the Bible as throughout equally a Revelation from GOD, or to renounce it altogether as no Revelation at all. Truly this is a dangerous thing to do, and deserving to be denounced as an act at once of ignorance and of injustice. To require a man to believe that every statement of the Old Testament is as much revealed as the name of GOD to Moses; or that every precept in it is as directly written with the finger of GOD as those of the awful Ten: or that in the New Testament Apostles were as infallible as their Master, or the disciples of Apostles as Apostles themselves—this is an undue taxing of any man's faith, and a requirement neither authorised by the letter of the Scriptures themselves, nor in harmony with their spirit.

For those surely, and at least, who have been taught from childhood to cast off the notion of an infallible authority on earth, and are continually exhorted to stand

fast in this liberty wherewith it is asserted that CHRIST has made men free—to prove all things—to search the Scriptures for themselves, and to believe nothing which cannot in their own judgment be proved thereby—for such as these it is an injustice. For they can only be justly required to proportion their faith to evidence: and the evidence for the Divinity of different portions of the Scriptures is different—different indeed to a degree which those who have not examined into these things cannot duly judge of. Those who have, however, will testify that the difference is large in the evidence of Divinity between that for the books of the Law and that for the books of the Chronicles: or between that for any epistle of Paul and that for the Second Epistle of Peter. There is not even the same kind or amount of evidence for the infallibility of the New Testament which there is for that of the old: none of that external Divine Testimony which is really the only support of any rigidity of theory. And if theories do not vary with varying facts, faith will.

XXXVI.

Impossibility of drawing any definite line of separation between the human and Divine.

But doubtless the constant pressing question will from time to time recur, Where draw the line between the human and the Divine in Scripture? And to this question the one true answer is: No man can draw such a line—scarcely sufficiently for himself, and certainly not so for any other than himself. If this be contradicted, then let those who think that they can draw such a line, draw it. Many have tried to do so already, and all have failed to satisfy any but themselves: and the lines so drawn have

remained to this day merely to mark the approximate boundaries of their knowledge, and the assured regions of their ignorance. We may often be able to pronounce where the spirit is, and where it is not—as we may pronounce between the living and the dead: but how divide spirit from sense in the living body? Truly we can no more draw a sharp line between the activity of GOD and that of man in spiritual things, than we can between the nature of man and that of GOD—and in neither case more than between the atmosphere of the earth and the ether of the heavens. No harsh transitions Nature knows—much less Spirit. For GOD created man in His own image, yea, in the image of GOD created He him: and though so much of this image be lost, yet is not all: and much of what has been lost, in the Christian is being regenerated. And are we not told, on the very highest authority, that while man is being thus restored, the Regenerating Spirit can be no more defined than the wind—that we cannot tell whence it comes or whether it goes. Truly if we would think of it well, we should not find it difficult to believe that that which is spiritual cannot be otherwise than indistinct to the natural eye, or that that which is invisible cannot be otherwise than indefinite. But is there nothing real but that which is palpable—nothing believable but that which is measurable? Is not the Christian's especial calling to walk by faith, and not by sight? and are not those things which are only spiritually to be discerned greater than all other things?

And not only in man's nature are the limits between the human and Divine not sharply marked, but also in the Moral Law is not the line between the essential and the

variable, the permanently obligatory and the occasionally permissible, left often but dimly known? Is not indeed the notion of a mechanical rule—a rule ever ready and ever applicable—in spiritual things altogether out of place? And is it not also almost a contradiction to suppose that the Almighty Wisdom would give a Revelation of essential truths to mankind exclusively or primarily, in obscure and doubtful portions of voluminous writings? Or that the Divine does not in the main authenticate itself? Or that there is so little revealed altogether that a few phrases may disconcert and repeal it all? Surely it is a better and a nobler faith to believe that the Bible has been given us to reveal something inherently luminous—something not so delicate and evanescent as to be dependent upon the uncorrupted preservation of innumerable minutiæ, but something so great and real and electric, that when uttered even only stammeringly by any tongue, it must find an echo in every humble and earnest heart. Assuredly we ought not to be so faithless as to doubt that the Revelation of GOD in JESUS CHRIST is such that its sum and substance may be influentially conveyed to men in any language under heaven, by any man who has himself received it, in the love of it, into his own heart.

XXXVII.

The perpetual inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Due meditation on what is implied in that condition of Divine influence which is the privilege of every true Christian, would also tend to lessen our feeling of the necessity of so large an assumption as that which is so often made, and to impress us with the sufficiency and suitableness of a

Scripture which should be specially Divine, though not circumstantially so. A characteristic gift of Christianity is that of the HOLY GHOST to all its genuine disciples—a special indwelling and illumination of GOD in the soul, by which it is enabled to rise to a higher power of spiritual discernment than it otherwise could do—an influence not strictly miraculous but yet strictly supernatural, which by purifying the heart strengthens the mind, and, in whatever way working, practically constitutes for man a real Revelation. It is the same Spirit which has embodied truth in the Bible that infuses the love of truth into the Christian, and no magnetism gives more assurance of its reality in material things than such sympathy gives in spiritual, that the sincere seeker shall ultimately find all such truth in the Bible as there is a moral fitness, or necessity, that he should possess. The same Spirit too which was promised to guide the Apostles first into all truth, was promised also to abide with the Church unto the end: and an unction from the Holy One by which we may know all things, is asserted by an apostle to be an attainable prerogative of Christians generally. He who knows anything of this—or even he only who has that within him which responds to the voice of the Divine whencesoever it may issue, and who is ever listening devoutly that he may catch its faintest sounds—such an one will feel the least inclined to require that every word should present itself to him with miraculous claims to his attention and belief: this will oftenest be the case only with those to whom the things of the Spirit are notions of the intellect rather than the experience of the heart, and who feel that unreserved submission to authority is a light burden compared with the necessity of perpetual choice.

Thus after all it may be that the HOLY SPIRIT may have influenced Apostles only in a greater degree, and not in a different method, from that in which He influences private Christians. We believe that He influences in some degree all Christians so as both to lead them into some truth, and to preserve them from some error; and we know that He did not influence Apostles so as either to lead them into all truth, or to preserve them from all error. And if Apostles had not the Spirit without measure (but only the LORD JESUS) and we know not the precise measure in which they had it, the suspicion of their infallibility, or even the demonstration of their fallibility, ought not to surprise or perplex us. Indeed the more fully we enter into this distinction between CHRIST and His Apostles—the more fully we recognise in Him the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in them the existence of a remainder of the original corruption of humanity—the less necessary, or even probable, we shall feel it to be, that there should have been any generic difference between the influence of the HOLY SPIRIT upon the minds and hearts of Apostles in the perception of some kinds of truths, and that which has been promised to, and possessed by, believers in all ages of the Church. What that might be which the HOLY SPIRIT did do for every apostle equally, and which He has not done since for any saint, we do not know: and we do know that there is nothing which is really for the spiritual good of any Christian which He now cannot, and now will not, do. It is written, He that is spiritual judgeth all things—let us well consider this—what it may mean, and what it must. If no man can say that JESUS CHRIST is Lord but by the HOLY GHOST, what must be the increased endowment of those

who can say much more than this? If the least in the kingdom of heaven was greater than John the Baptist, and he greater than any Priest or Prophet who came before him, must it be necessarily irreverent if any one who has been blessed with the full light of the New Testament from infancy to manhood, should consider himself competent to judge concerning the details of the Old?

If indeed we have no such privilege as this of being taught of GOD in some measure in these ages as they of old had in a greater—if there is not any reality in a perpetual inhabitation of the Church by the Spirit—if all individual communion and commerce with Heaven is mere delusion and conceit—then indeed much in these pages is false, and so is much elsewhere besides. But if these things be true—if the doctrine of the HOLY GHOST be a greater reality, and the Pentecostal gifts be symbolical of those which are Perpetual—then may we have in this grand endowment of an indwelling Spirit more than a compensation for any fallibility of the letter, and hereby be enabled to judge, as well as to discern, things spiritual and sacred sufficiently for our needs.

XXXVIII.

An infallible record would require an infallible interpreter.

It might be asked, then, Where is the necessity, and where the satisfaction, in the rigid theory of Divine influence in the case of the letter of the Sacred Scriptures?

So far as we can see, a large portion of the historical Scriptures (which is a large portion of the whole) may have been just as substantially well composed without any special Revelation to the minds of the writers, or special guardian-

ship over them, as with it. It is only by magnifying to an unnatural degree the importance of historical minutiæ, that such extraordinary Divine guidance is supposed to be either necessary or profitable. Very many of the facts which we find recorded in large portions of the Hebrew Scriptures are apparently but of very limited significance for even the maturest Christian, and in the record of them diligence and truthfulness seem the principal qualities required, and these are not commonly classed among miraculous gifts. No necessities of human education, or of Christian, apparently require infallibility in such historic details: and it is even difficult to define what amount of merely circumstantial error in such writings must necessarily be of essential injury to the soul of any man who would be benefitted by their infallibility. It would seem, therefore, only reasonable to believe that wherever in the Law or History of the Bible we cannot but conscientiously believe that the essential needs of a devout soul would not certainly be injured by the existence of error, there error may not have been rendered supernaturally impossible, but have been allowed to be regulated as to its existence or its absence by those general laws by which GOD ordinarily allows the minds of men to be governed. And not only as respects facts may this be, but also as respects what may be distinctively termed truths, or technically doctrines. For if a declaration relating to the nature of GOD or the duty of man be true, it does not therefore necessarily follow that is a direct and exclusive Revelation to him who utters it. It may be a part of that Light which lighteth every man who comes into the world—an element of that fundamental spirituality in man which makes him a

being capable of being benefitted by a Revelation, or a legitimate product of the due use of some human gift, or special endowment, or a fairly consequent deduction from some primary intuition or some former Revelation. For be it remembered that all truth that is essential and obligatory for man is not (what we commonly call) revealed : much of it is either instinctive, traditional, or discovered.

The supposed necessity, however, of this theory, and its satisfaction, will ever ultimately be found to rest on the (Roman) ground, that there is a certain fixed form of doctrine which it is necessary for all men equally to receive ; or at least that the salvation of man depends on his receiving a series of doctrinal propositions which are traditional inferences from Scriptural assertions, and can be substantiated by literal proofs. But even here the most infallible Revelation which is not self-interpreting (which ours confessedly is not) will be liable to fallibility in the process of interpretation. We cannot get rid of the exercise of merely human judgment (on Protestant principles) in the interpretation of Scripture. In order to interpret a very large portion of the Bible, and to decide some of the most difficult and important of its questions, we cannot avoid relying largely on our own understandings, and giving ourselves up to the guidance of purely human rules, grammatical and other. The Bible does not furnish us with any infallible principles or rules for its own interpretation : what, then, can we do but make the best principles and rules that we are able for ourselves? And in doing this. how shall we surely not err? It would seem impossible to extract infallibility out of such conditions as these. If indeed the mind to which imperfect documents be subjected

be supernaturally helped, the problem might be solved: and an approximation to the solution will be obtained in proportion as the mind of the reader is thus strengthened to discern between the perfect and the imperfect. In this direction alone is it hopeful to seek for infallibility. And in this direction the difficulty has been overcome by the Church of Rome. That Church by claiming to be a perpetual infallible interpreter of the written Word has given to its members an assurance which none others can have. For those who deem themselves privileged to dissent from that Church, their privilege will ever be accompanied by the deduction of a constant sense of fallibility: a deficiency which they can never wholly remove in the flesh, but which they may continually lessen by becoming more and more partakers of that Divine Spirit which is promised in the Bible to guide believing minds into all the truth it is really necessary for them to know.

And such may take further courage and comfort from the recollection that it is not necessary to know all truth, and that even our real ground of safety does not lie in the present perfection of our knowledge of the Will of GOD, but in the degree of our sincerity in obeying it as far as we know it, and in seeking to know it better. The fact is, our ultimate Judge and Saviour is not the Bible but the Author and Giver of the Bible, and He can and will discern the thoughts and intents of our hearts in this matter as in all others, and justify or condemn us according as these have been right or wrong. Our salvation depends more upon our faith than upon our knowledge, and perhaps more upon our love than upon either. These will not preserve us from all intellectual error in reference to the Divine

Will, but they will preserve us from all final harm in consequence of that error. So long as the love of GOD in CHRIST is the ruling motive of a man in his search after truth and duty, in the Bible or elsewhere, no error he may fall into will endanger his final happiness: and therefore our chiefest anxiety should be directed not to the fancied consequences of our creed, but to the actual purity of our conscience.

Let it then be patiently considered, whether a fallible record with an infallible interpreter would not be as valuable for man as an infallible record with only a fallible interpreter; and then, whether that which would seem most suitable alike to our needs and to our capacities be not precisely that which we have—something between the two—a record substantially influenced by that same Divine Spirit which is promised substantially to influence the reader—which is the Spirit equally of Holiness and of Truth.

XXXIX.

The principles here maintained are affirmative, not negative.

Let us now review, and reviewing compare, the position of that theory of Divine Influence on the Sacred Scriptures which these pages commend, and of the more rigid one more commonly held, but which these pages discountenance.

The belief herein contended for holds, that the Bible contains a Revelation from GOD, and all such Revelation as is necessary and sufficient for man's salvation: that within the limits of the Jewish and the Christian canon lies a wisdom which can, and which only can, make man wise unto everlasting life: that in fact no words which can be

used on the more rigid theory to express the sacredness of the letter can be too great to characterise the worth of what that letter contains, and will convey to all who study it aright. It also holds that the Bible is more and other than a Revelation: that it rather contains many Revelations and some things beside which are not Revelations: And also that the Revelations are to be constituted into one Revelation, not simply by indiscriminate addition, but by arrangement as a series; and that therefore in the interpretation of the whole, especial attention must be paid to the fact that Revelation has been progressive—has been given at sundry times and in divers manners, and only according as men were able to bear it: and that in all such Revelations there has ever been an express adaptation to the capacity of its original recipients. And also, that together with the subject of special Revelation there is often commingled something that is extrinsic; something that may be considered as simply the vehicle necessary to convey healthfully to the soul of man the powerful nutriment and medicine which pure truth must ever be; and that it is neither wise nor reverent to confound the transitory and special form with the characteristic and permanent essence. And thus finally, while it holds as essential, and professedly assumes and asserts, an immediate influence of GOD acting on the minds and hearts of men throughout the composition of the whole, it does not consider every portion of it so specially the result of Divine interference as to have an independent and universal authority of its own: but that our judgment of the worth of many portions may and must be influenced by considerations arising from the necessarily progressive nature of all culture of the human

faculties: and that it is the especial duty and calling of the spiritual man to discern between the things in it which differ, and to subordinate the less excellent to the more so, not according indeed to any independent measure of value which he may invent for himself, but according to that which is taught him by the fundamental principles and pervading spirit of that final Revelation which has been given us by JESUS CHRIST.

Some of the advantages attendant upon this view are these. To the spiritualist the uncertainties and imperfections which criticism has hitherto made manifest in the letter of the Bible are of very little importance. Suppose there be many irreconcilable discrepancies between the books of Kings and of Chronicles, or many latter interpolations in the books of Genesis or of Judges—or that some of the proverbs of Solomon, or his Song of Songs, be only questionably in any special sense Divine; or suppose that we cannot but acknowledge that there is an inextricable confusion in the evangelists' accounts of some portions of our Saviour's history—or that St. Paul and St. John were mistaken in expecting in their generation a coming of the Lord, and an end of the world, quite different from that which was intended by their Master, and from that which really did take place in the destruction of the divinely-instituted polity of Judaism—these things can have little prejudicial effect upon him who does not expect infallibility in matters on which he does not feel that the interests of his soul in any way depend. Were the ambiguities of the letter much greater than they are, they would still leave the great foundations of his Creed untouched. He founds little upon particular passages or expressions standing

alone, and if these were withdrawn from him they would draw with them but a few of the outworks of his edifice of faith. This is constructed by him rather according to the principles, than exclusively with the materials, of Scripture, and until the very substance of its Revelation be destroyed, he may indeed be disturbed in the arrangements of his habitation, but he will be without fear as to its essential stability. His principles recognise the possibility, and even enforce the necessity, of extracting the spirit from the letter. They assume indeed that this is the special calling of the Christian, and his gift. They regard the Scriptures as a depository of particular truths rather than as a Revelation of absolute truth, and therefore consider it not only permissible, but even obligatory, to distinguish between that which is intended to be conveyed, and that which it only used as an instrument of conveyance. And not only do such views exhort that the imperfections of the human should not be confounded with the glory of the Divine, but they also assume a spirit in the Christian sympathetic with the spirit which the letter of the Scripture is intended to convey—a spirit which is generically the same with that which dwelt in the writers, and which alone can make the letter to give life.

If then the indefiniteness herein spoken of should be so great as to leave it in uncertainty whether in our Bible we do not exclude something that was originally written for our learning, or include some apocryphal writings, it would not be of much consequence on the principles herein stated. St. John expressly tells us that there were many other sayings and deeds of JESUS besides those of which we have any record. Now these words and works, being

Divine, must have had an immense and expansive significance: and though we have no reason for supposing that they would materially have modified our conception of the pervading spirit and general purposes of our Lord's Revelations, yet they may very probably have shown us that no one evangelist has adequately presented to us the fulness of His mind. We see indeed that this is so on the careful comparison of the various accounts which we now have from the four—the impression derived from the record of an event or saying by any one of them being different from that which we ultimately receive when we have filled in that record with all the details which are furnished by the other three. But can any one say that we have not enough recorded of JESUS to make those believe that He is the Son of GOD who would have believed had they been afforded more? If not, then may we not suppose that there is some lesson which it was meant that we should learn by this limitation and indefiniteness, which is worth the learning, and which we should probably have failed to learn if it had been otherwise? And may not that lesson be of this kind, that the Christian Bible is to be to us as a depository of principles and not of rules, and to furnish us with specimens of the kind of spirit and of life which we are to be of, rather than with the precise form of outward action—that it was to give us not minute and circumstantial, but large and spiritual, guidance, that we might grow in grace from within, and not be moulded only from without—and that it was in fact to be to all ages not as the details of a legal document, but as the free counsels of a living Friend.

And is it not also true that, let the imperfections and

indefiniteness of the Christian Scriptures be magnified to the uttermost, they are insignificant in the judgment of any spiritual mind, when compared with the grand truths which they assert and reveal? It might suffice to ask, Has any individual, or church, or nation, ever yet come up to their generally acknowledged requirements? or come so far within sight of their limits as to be practically impeded by them even in aspiration? And if not, what can it be but intolerable presumption to say that we need more than we at present possess?

XL.

Difficulties of the opposite view.

The more rigid theory, which is more popularly received, and which holds that there is no separable human element in the Bible—that its several books not only contain the Word of GOD, but are constituted of the Words of GOD, and of them alone, and that all therefore is throughout of equal and supreme authority—this is a belief which involves in it many difficulties and disadvantages. By disallowing any human element, or any condescending adaptation, we are deprived at once of much feeling of sympathy with the writers of the Bible—as in such case they become but as mere instruments rather than agents of the Supreme—and we are put out of harmony with what we think we see to be the condition of GOD'S dealings in all other parts of His influence on man that we know of; we find broken that chain of analogies which we appear able to trace throughout the varied economy of His educational processes: and thus a preliminary difficulty—the source of other consequent difficulties in detail almost innumerable—is introduced—which if gratuitous is certainly unwise. But not only this;

we are henceforth exposed to attacks of criticism quite countless and endless: and our faith is ever liable to rude shocks, if not more, at each fresh difficulty which can be raised as to any sentence, or even word, throughout documents extending over a period of the ancient history of man for fifteen centuries and more. The literalist depending much on particular passages and on certain expressions being of one form and not of another, is in continual danger of having the large inferences which his system allows and even requires him to erect upon them brought to the ground by a progressive scholarship. The fearful anxieties which have been caused to those who maintained such opinions, even in our days, by the progress of science, ought not to be readily forgotten by themselves, and will not be so by others: and though now gradually these are subsiding everywhere, they ought not to be allowed to do so wholly, without leaving us the lesson of the fallibility of even the devoutest dogmatism. The greatest importance used to be attached, for instance, to the passage of the three witnesses, and to some others of like significance and of equally doubtful authority, in the New Testament; and it was long and loudly declared that the surrender of them would be dangerous to the very foundations of the Christian faith. Good scholars who are also confessedly good Christians now no longer contend for their authenticity, and yet the anticipated consequence has not followed. Those dishonesties, too, of theological controversy, and those intellectual immoralities of many kinds, which have been the scandal of the Church, while they have not all, or nearly all, been the result of conscious unfairness, have been largely attributable to false principles of interpretation

founded on this fundamental misconception of the characteristic aim and nature of Biblical Revelation.

And also, under the more rigid theory, the earnest but free mind is continually fretted by the opposition of restraints which bear upon them the character of human rather than of Divine imposition, and is perpetually required to regard that as sacred which seems to it not to be so—and this is a condition which must instigate to resistance in the most pacific, and to rebellion in the more militant: while the indolence and prejudice of the well-meaning are fostered delusively by the supposition, that a Divine authority has interposed to decide questions once for all which are really left to be decided afresh from age to age, by the exercised faculties of each spiritual mind.

And what have been historically the advantages of the more rigid theory? Has the result which has attended the assertion of it been such as to satisfy any thoughful mind, or to gratify any religious one? Has it prevented controversies? or rather has it not given rise to them more abundantly? Does it solve any of those great difficulties which have been common to all ages? Has it not introduced new ones? Does it not rather ignore the anxieties of the most earnest, and contradict the acquisitions of the most enlightened? Has it even secured to the most simply devout any theoretic unanimity? or what result is there which it has accomplished which might not have been accomplished by a less rigid theory, and may not yet be? Almost every difficulty which is presented by the less definite theory is presented also by that which is the most so: and the history of exposition testifies most clearly that there are very few who hold the strict theory who are not compelled to

make practical relaxations of exposition which impair the consistency of their principles, and who do not transfer to their rules of interpretation a licence which amounts to an equivalent for what elsewhere they are anxious to deny. Such criticism as in these pages is recommended is such as only encourages and enables men to do thinkingly and openly—consciously and thoroughly—what many of the best do now with no other science than that of the heart, and no other wisdom than that of a pious experience: and it seems at once both the most wise and the most honest to do all that we do in so great a matter with a single eye and an open heart.

But whatever may be the real fact with regard to the absolute infallibility of the letter of Scripture, it would be well to bear in mind that a belief that it is infallible is one which it is almost impossible that the great majority of men should intelligently entertain: and that therefore probably it is not, and cannot be, required of them. For if ever this infallibility should be proved, it can only be by a kind and an amount of evidence which is utterly inappreciable and unattainable by any but the very few. A judgment to be given on a fair examination of such evidence is one of the very hardest requirements which can be made of the most cultivated mind. It involves considerations of the highest scholarship—a knowledge of tongues and of their interpretation the most accurate, and a discerning of spirits, which are the gifts only of the fewest among mankind.

And finally, Has the Bible ever conveyed truth infallibly to men? to any one known man in all known history? Has ever any man held—does any man now hold—infallible, unchangeable truth, concerning any of its characteristic

spiritual Revelations? Nay, can any of us have infallible thoughts about infinite objects? Are we not at all spiritually as children while here on earth? But infallible children?

XLI.

Qualifications of a student of Holy Scripture.

With these views, then, let us consider the relation of the scholar towards the original Scriptures, and that also of the student of a mere translation.

For all students of the Bible equally, the primary requisites are earnestness and reverence. First of all there must be a disposition of docility, of thoughtfulness, and of patience—a nature simple, true, and free: consulting primarily the intuitions of the reason and the instincts of the conscience: a mind open to all theories but straining after none: at once ductile and self-determining: unwearied in seeking and in listening; in judging, independent and impartial. This kind of nature we call one that is sincere; and without this sincerity all error is possible to man, let him have what other accomplishments he may: if he be destitute of this one fundamental possession, there is no kind or amount of evil into which he may not at any time fall. It is beyond human power to guard even the clearest truth from abuse by a dishonest heart. There is no possibility of dispensing with this requirement in any moral judgment or investigation: much less in that large and complex combination of such judgments and investigations which scriptural studies involve. But over and above this general fundamental sincerity, there must be reverence in the student of the Bible: a religious sensitiveness and devoutness in regard to every probable manifestation of the

Divine : a love of truth and of goodness indefinitely great, yea, such a magnetic attraction towards them as shall often be able to instinctively separate the pure from the impure, and even the better from the less good.

These fundamental qualities alone may do much in the case of the student of a mere vernacular translation of the Bible—may indeed under certain conditions do almost all that for such an one is absolutely necessary. But he who would aspire to an understanding of more than the outline of GOD'S Revelation, and of the spirit of the Scriptures, must add to these things enlightened scholarship. The more educated a man is, all moral qualities being the same, the more luminous will be his exposition of Scripture. The Bible being a collection of books which furnish materials of investigation of almost unbounded variety and subjects of meditation of the very loftiest kind, no attainments of erudition extensively available elsewhere will be useless here, and no endowments of the intellect which are of essential worth need here remain without a large and a fitting exercise. Indeed it might be said, that there is no subject prominently brought before a man by those studies which make him a scholar, which is not brought before him also in the Bible : and the more a student knows of the history of man, and is conversant with his condition in various quarters of the world, and in all periods of the past, the more justly and fully will he probably be able to interpret that peculiar view of the small section of human history which the Scriptures present. The superiority of the scholar very principally consists in his acquaintance with the principles and applications of the languages of mankind—the laws and rules of human thought and speech. And surely in the case of

documents which were written in distant countries and in ancient times, and in languages no longer spoken among men, such kind of knowledge must be of essential worth: and it is but an obvious and elementary assumption, that nothing but the greatest care and caution will be able to interpret justly writings such as these.

That such learning is necessary for the mere translation of them is obvious: but for their interpretation also it should be considered whether it be not scarcely less so. For every ancient written language is a most composite and complicate structure, and incorporates in itself traces of the whole history of the people who have used it: and it is no more just to insist on the universal significance of forms of expression than it is to assert the universal applicability of manners and customs. There must ever be great differences of expression for the same thoughts and feelings among various peoples—in Asia and Europe, for instance, in Judæa and in England. Those who have personally witnessed the differences existing among nations in the present day, may judge well of such differences existing of old: and even those who have nothing to judge by but the testimony of others, and foreign writings translated literally into their own language, may yet form some approximate estimate of the carefulness necessary as to the interpretation of language, if they will but patiently compare modes of expression of the same facts or feelings prevalent among one people with those employed by others, and both with such as they may from their own use and observation have been able to constitute into standards of measure. There is doubtless a limit to the differences and ambiguities and conventional significations of language, and the assumption of this is the

foundation of all hope in the study of universal and comparative grammar: but the interval between the apparently opposing variations is always sufficient to demand recognition, and often so great as to defy explanation. All languages, too, have always been fluctuating, and none is ever in one stay. The intellectual coinage of mankind will be found to vary, either from unavoidable wear or positive alloy, much as that does which is more material; and there will therefore be continual carefulness demanded in adjusting from time to time the standard of value.

And also it might be said, if it were allowable to change the comparison so abruptly, that it will be seldom safe for any one to assume that the merely literal is the true significance of all language, or that there are not differing modes in which that significance must be arrived at: but that rather as we gain nothing by eating the skin of the grape or the husk of the corn, so perchance we shall not gain much by pressing or grinding very strenuously the mere letter of any language, or interpreting only by modern processes that which is both ancient and popular. Though there be the same elementary substances of nutriment in each and all of the writers of Holy Scripture, yet even here there is a very great variety in the conditions under which they are presented to us—as much, it may be, as there is in the fruits of the earth by which man's bodily life is supported, and perhaps for the same reason. The language of the Old Testament, too, exhibits various natural changes in it corresponding to the facts of Hebrew history. There is indeed an appearance of the Hebrew Scriptures having been edited and revised by some later hand (as has been already noticed in reference to the difficulties presented by the apparent

chronological anomalies presented by some of the earlier books), and this may have given them something of a more equable character of style than otherwise they would have had, but still the book of Esther differs largely from the book of Genesis, and the Song of Solomon from the Song of Deborah, and even Ecclesiastes from Proverbs, and the later from the earlier Prophets.

But in addition to these facts which are common to the most exact and elaborate compositions in the most perfect of all languages, there are peculiarities attending the language of the Bible which give them an especial importance. The Bible indeed is written in two of the most perfectly constructed of all languages : but in the case of that language in which the earlier portions of it are written, not only is that language, though so admirable in its structure, very limited in its powers of expressing classic or modern truths, but we have no other books written in it but the books which we wish to interpret, and therefore our knowledge of that language must be peculiarly imperfect—we having in this case few opportunities of judging of the various uses of words and phrases, and in many cases none at all. We have indeed for the most part to make our dictionary and our grammar out of the books themselves, with little other help than that to be derived from cognate languages and corrupted dialects of the same. And in the case of the New Testament, though its writers used the noblest language of antiquity, and perhaps the most comprehensive and flexible instrument of thought ever employed by man, yet they used a form of it which was strongly tinged with foreign admixtures, and wrote for the first time in that language concerning truths which were more comprehensive than the

forms of expression of any language whatsoever. The Greek of the New Testament is not only very sensibly different from that of the classics, but also that of one portion of it is very sensibly different from that of another. The language of Paul, for instance, is very different from that of John, and that of Luke from that of Peter. And besides other departures from the standard language of the age, there is a strong tincture of Hebrew expression derived from the circumstances of the older history of the Jews : an Alexandrian influence arising from their connection with the Egyptians, and an Aramæan one derived from the language of the land of the writers' nativity.

And let us also remember that in no part of it is the Bible scientific, or technical, or precise, and in some parts it is loosely idiomatic—as for instance in the Proverbs of Solomon; while in others it is highly artificial—as for instance in the alphabetical Psalms. It is throughout indeed a very considerable accommodation to human, and even particular, infirmities; and it would be no more just to judge in all respects its verbal expressions by the rules of modern speech than it would be to apply to the language of our people the precise nomenclature of our philosophers. And if besides this it be allowed, as these pages say, that GOD has suited His Revelation to these imperfections of man's language—and made His communications adapt themselves to human modes of thought and utterance, as often perhaps as He has obliged such vehicles to conform themselves to His communications—then we must assuredly bear in mind that these modes and instruments of human expression differ so much in different ages and among different peoples, that herein is loud call and large room

for the exercise of the maturest judgment, and the most cultured understanding: and that there is always an antecedent presumption that more than merely verbal translation will be required when a Divine communication which was made especially for the East is transplanted to the West, or when the precepts or practices presented to the Patriarchs or the Jews are to be adduced as law for the latest generations of the faithful.

But what rules of interpretation, it may be said, is it here proposed to lay down? It is answered, This book is concerned with principles only, not with rules: and provided its principles be admitted, and the spirit which it recommends be possessed, it is considered of little importance what rules may be laid down. Indeed it is wished to say that there need be adopted no special system of rules for Biblical study and interpretation which should separate it from classical study. Whatever is required for the exact translation and interpretation of ancient authors is required in the case of the Bible, and nothing else which is different in kind. Any special training for Biblical study tends more frequently than otherwise, in average minds, rather to impair fairness than to impart power, and for those who are of the stronger kind, if healthy and well-exercised, such special rules are for the most part useless. To add historic imagination to grammatical accuracy, and to build all upon the susceptibilities of a reverent soul, will suffice for superiority of translation: while to dispossess the mind of much that has been acquired desultorily and traditionally, and open it fairly and freely to the influences of the Revelation it investigates, is the principal rule and requisite for the soundest interpretation.

We must always, however, take heed carefully to modify many Scriptural expressions by reference to the circumstances under which they were delivered: remembering that we have to judge the Bible—especially the Old Testament—with an Asiatic measure generally, with an antique one always. Modern occidentalism is a wholly unjust line, if the only one: and to apply the rules of logic to the language of piety or of poetry, or remorselessly to analyse the warm rich life of Eastern imagery and passion, is but the sign of a hopeless, and fruitless exposition. But yet how common has it been to do this: and what controversies and errors have been generated by immortalising, as it were, merely temporary forms of expression, and by crystalising into permanent shapes the floating clouds of metaphor or mere drapery. Wherefore it should be very carefully considered in all interpretation of Scripture beyond translation, whether the modes in which Scriptural writers exhibit truths to Jews and Gentiles, and the arguments and illustrations by which they support them, would probably be those under which, much less under which alone, they would have exhibited these truths had they had the same mission now to us who have been educated under such different conditions.

XLII.

Qualifications of a student unacquainted with Hebrew and Greek.

The calling and the duties of the mere student of a translation, it would be well also to consider.

The Scriptures, both Jewish and Christian, have been almost exclusively known to mankind not through their original tongues but through translations—a most important fact to bear in mind in reference to an estimate of the

degree of sacredness to be attached to the letter. The Hebrew Scriptures in their present integrity seem never to have been popularly read among the Jews: and most remarkable must it ever seem to us, there was no provision for the general education of the people in their Law: no teaching of it, or preaching of it, in any such sense as we moderns understand. There was no anticipatory command to the Jews that they should be from time to time instructed in all the Oracles of GOD which should ever be written for the nation's learning: and we have no accounts from any source that such was practically the case at any period before the formation of the Canon. The omission of any such provisions of education as afterwards existed, through the Scribes and the Synagogues, with the consequent ignorance of the great majority of the people, and even of the Priests, of the very existence of any book of the Law, in its present shape, for so long, is one of the most notable facts of Jewish history, and one which has not been sufficiently dwelt upon. It certainly ought not to be forgotten that the reverence which the Jews paid to the letter of their sacred books as a whole in the time of our Lord, was in a very great measure a growth of the period which intervened between the closing of the Old Testament and the opening of the New. We meet with nothing like this state of things before the Captivity—with so little reference indeed to the existence of such a body of sacred literature that there is scarcely any notice in the whole writings of the Prophets of any Scripture that preceded them—nothing at all of the same kind and amount of reference which we find in any one of the compositions of the New Testament to the books of the elder Scripture.

And also it ought to be remembered that the Jews in the time of our Lord did not speak, nor perhaps generally understood, the Hebrew of the Bible. Portions of the Hebrew Scriptures (and only portions of them) were read in the synagogues, but otherwise the Old Testament was accessible to the people only through a translation. During their captivity in Babylon the Jews lost their spoken language, and the very letters in which it used to be written—a most remarkable fact; and we learn from Nehemiah that on their return they required the words of the law even to be interpreted to them. The books written after the Captivity by doctors of the law were not in the pure language of the nation, and it is most probable that the language of the Bible was henceforth no more used in the common speech of Jews than it is at this present day. Thus the Jews of our Lord's time stood in the same relation to their sacred books as we do to them, and to our own. There was with them, as with us, a body of scholars and of scribes who could read the original tongues, but the great multitude were almost wholly dependent on translations.

And so it has been to a considerable degree with the Christian Scriptures. The Vulgate of Christendom for fifteen centuries was Latin—since then half English and half German also. But the Latin, though incomparably more faithful than the Septuagint, is far from being perfect: and came to its present maturity by no sudden birth, but only after the growth of centuries. The German—whether we take the first or the last translation of the whole Bible—is indeed a noble product in the former case of piety, and in the latter of scholarship—but yet in many places it

embodies modes of thought and feeling on which no dependence can be placed as exact impressions of the Divine Mind. Our English translation is so unusually good, and so specially adapted to our own wants, that it might be thought without extravagance to have been ordered providentially: and those who are mainly dependent upon it for their knowledge of GOD's Revelation, may well be immeasurably thankful to have it represented to them thus. But no translation from a dead language into a living one can convey more than the substance of that with which it deals; and no translation from the Hebrew and Greek into English made two centuries and a half ago can be reasonably expected to be adequate to the needs of all future time. The language into which the translation is made changes every century at least, and our acquaintance with the language from which it is made in such periods changes too: alterations, therefore, become expedient from time to time—alterations, however, which do not necessarily imply any discredit to our fathers, nor any credit to ourselves. And our present authorised translation is very different from, and very much better than, others that were previously authorised and given to our people as a transcript of the Word of GOD. The fact is, that every translation must always be in a great measure an interpretation or an exposition, rather than a transcript: and it must therefore inevitably contain in it a large amount of human comment and opinion, which is ever liable to do us the double injury of conveying a false meaning, and concealing the true. Let any one weigh well what it is to translate such a collection of documents as constitute the Bible, and then compare it with any other intellectual labour whatsoever, and say

whether it is not one so much beyond ordinary human strength as almost necessarily to display evidences of human weakness. And if these things be true, how ill would it fare with the multitude of the pious in all ages if the letter was so sacred as any rigid theory of Divine Influence would require.

Most earnestly, then, it is here asked, Is it not an act of becoming reverence rather than of any unbecoming presumption, in one who can read merely such a copy of the original, to be distrustful of it as to whatever in it is not obviously of the very essence of the Revelation? Even in the case of the original Scriptures, if men build large systems of opinions on merely verbal foundations, it is impossible but that in such a varied collection of writings as constitute the Bible, there should not be found expressions which might be made, not wholly inaptly, to sanction almost any opinion not obviously wicked. But in any translation—in ours—the probability is indefinitely increased: and experience has amply proved it to be the case, that among English Christians not even the strangest theological or ecclesiastical extravagance has been wanting in seeming warranty of sacred Scripture. Wherefore in proportion to a man's reverence for the letter is he bound not to found much on the mere expressions of a translation, unless those expressions be often repeated, and the spirit of them is sanctioned, and the significance of them is confirmed, by other indisputable assertions of Holy Writ. Wherever such confirmations are wanting, he ought to take the greatest heed lest he should be receiving the word of men as if it were the Word of GOD. At the least the man who sets out with the germinant fallacy that the English

authorised version of the Bible may be used as the original might be, is only to be listened to respectfully when he argues from its spirit: when he presumes to dogmatise from its letter, he ought to be either rebuked or avoided.

XLIII.

Human learning not opposed to spiritual insight.

But is not the learning of this world, here so highly spoken of, declared in the Scriptures themselves to be nothing worth in spiritual things, and has it not been found by experience to be prejudicial to the faithful reception of the essential and vital Revelation? Have not the wise in this world's reputation been oftenest those who have darkened the counsel of GOD by words without insight into its spirit? and is it not written, Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord—and GOD hath made foolish the wisdom of this world? To such questions it is answered, It is quite impossible that there should be a direct Scriptural discouragement of that learning here spoken of, for it did not then exist, and without it equally is it impossible for the Bible to convey to us the significance of its own commands. That wisdom which the Scripture calls folly the earnest student of the Scripture will for his purpose call folly too: but as the Gospel has not given to our age a gift of those tongues, or of the interpretation of them, in which the Bible itself is written, we are obliged, by a necessity which the natural mind of the many would willingly dispense with, to make up something of that in which we are lacking when we are compared with those to whom the Revelations of the Bible were primarily addressed,

by as dutiful and diligent an use of existing means as may be in our power.

And it should be most carefully borne in mind, that the main use of the learning here recommended is merely to make up for our natural deficiencies—to gain, in fact, simply as good a position for understanding the details of the Revelations of GOD as was enjoyed by the great majority of those to whom they were originally vouchsafed. For the greatest scholar of these days is in many points far below the most unlearned of those days. The most ignorant contemporary of Moses or David or Isaiah—the commonest fisherman or craftsman who was a hearer of the Apostles—was in a better position for understanding the letter at least of their teaching than the most accomplished critic of our times. They were better acquainted practically with the genius of the languages in which the heavenly communications were made, and had a fuller knowledge of their special and primary reference, than we can ever hope to attain. True it is that our knowledge of the manners and customs, of the geography and chronology, of either Scriptures is sufficient for a general comprehension of the spirit and substance of the Jewish or the Christian faith, and that to one who is seeking only how to save his own soul alive, it can matter little to him to know whether the Jews ate sitting or reclining—whether their corn ripened in April or in August—or what were the boundaries of their tribes, or what were the dates of their captivities. And so also it might be added, that for such readers it can really matter equally little if some of the Mosaic ordinances are singularly similar to those of Egyptian wisdom, or if some pages of the Hebrew Chronicles are not circumstantially

correct, or if the books of Job or of Esther are only indirect Revelation; whether the genealogies of Matthew and of Luke are, or are not, infallible and consistent, or whether St. Paul and St. John were, or were not, mistaken as to the day and the generation of the final coming of the Son of Man. But though such details be of little importance to such readers, yet all readers are not such, and cannot be; and for those who are otherwise—for those especially whose calling is to expound any and every portion of the Scriptures in which others may take interest or find difficulty—or to correct the teaching of men who think minutiæ of importance, and explain to them the contradiction of the weightiest things both of the Law and of the Gospel—for these such knowledge is important. When we have to deal with those who think the minutest statistical details as much portions of the dictates of Revelation as the most catholic utterances of Moses or of Paul, of Isaiah or of John—who deduce large theoretic inferences from mere forms of phraseology, and who practically treat a solitary expression, anyhow detached or anywhere extracted, as sufficient to sanction a dogma opposed to the fundamental instincts of our nature—such learning is of especial worth. And though it be thus admitted that it is more valuable in guarding us from error than in guiding us into truth, yet probably every one's experience even of his own days will amply testify, that such a safeguard is a valuable portion of a student's equipment: for that if the undue assumptions of learning have been too many, they have yet been exceeded by those of ignorance and intolerance combined.

XLIV.

The simplicity and the difficulties of spiritualism.

Mere piety, or honesty, or a desire to learn GOD's Will, or to diffuse GOD's Truth, or any moral quality or Christian grace whatsoever, apart from patient and intelligent study, will not suffice for understanding in detail, or for a varied application of, large portions of the Bible. For though it may be truly said in one sense that the Bible is a book so plain that every one may read that out of it which may make him wise unto salvation, yet it must be remembered that this is only true on the assumption that the wisdom unto salvation is rather of a spiritual than of a literal or a theoretic kind. For indeed it is only in the universal truths relating to the character of Deity, and His disposition towards man; in the great outlines of human duty and destiny; in the representations of CHRIST, and in the characteristics of Christianity—that the Bible is a plain book. In many other respects it is beyond all other books hard to be understood. Let him who doubts this sit down in earnest to translate and expound Leviticus and Romans, Ezekiel and the Revelations, without those aids of modern learning which it is here supposed that he wishes to put aside: and he will rise up from his work assuredly increasing the conviction of others, and probably his own, that where intellect and honesty are presumed equal, the better scholar will produce the better translation, and the wiser man the more profitable exposition.

How can it be otherwise than that in a collection of writings so many of which were specially adapted to the circumstances of a people who were professedly and elaborately unlike all other peoples—a people differing exceed-

ingly in natural and social character from ourselves, and living under institutions which gave an arbitrary significance to the laws and regulations, the history and worship, which these Sacred Writings exhibit and embody—considerable learning and experience of mankind should be absolutely required for even their merely correct literal interpretation: but when we add to this the consideration, that in order to apply and expound these writings as exemplary and obligatory for Christians, we must extract the universal from the local, and the permanent from the accidental, and actually even renounce much of that which those of old time were required to obey—we surely cannot but regard this as a task demanding extensive acquirements, and a certain faculty of judgment more frequently the result of exercise than of intuition, to perform with an edifying and self-authenticating discrimination.

And then, too, the Bible containing what at first sight it might not to many seem probable that it should contain—literal and verbal contradictions to fact, and apparent inconsistencies with itself—demands principles for its interpretation which it must require patience as well as piety to frame. A pious but impatient person either turns away from such difficulties altogether, or supposes that they were meant simply as trials for his faith, and in that view of them has them ever with him as thorns in his mind—providential instruments of discipline. But a person who adds manly energy to his faith may come to a more satisfactory conclusion than this, and will in time almost certainly be able to discover modes of Divine operation which will reduce very considerably the effect of the apparent anomalies.

XLV.

Does criticism necessarily involve or lead to sceptical unbelief?

Does not, however, all such intellectual criticism of the Sacred Scriptures—this supposed discrimination of less and more sacred—this constant suspicion and contemplation of the human—this free and, as it must seem to some, familiar treatment of what is so holy—tend greatly to lower the tone of personal piety, and to make men come to the study of the Bible rather as judges than as disciples, and ultimately to send them away from it rather less believing and more sceptical than they came to it? To this it can only here be replied, that this need not be so; and that in many instances it has not been so, and is not so. More intimate conversance and communion with Holy Scriptures has a natural tendency to make the student himself more holy, and there must be in the state of any heart in which this effect is not produced, some peculiar hindrance which these pages do not contemplate. It is doubtless probable that one who so confines his attention to the human that he practically subordinates to it the Divine in his studies, may have the small portion of piety which such a case implies diminished continually while it lasts, the longer he continues those studies; and there is no provision in this book which would prevent this. But in a more average case, it would indeed be sad if it were necessary to believe that the stricter and more intelligent our examination of the Scriptures, the less must be our appreciation of them—that the more we search them the less we must find in them to reverence. For such examination is a necessity—such search is a command—laid upon us by GOD. We cannot get rid of the task, and surely therefore

the more thoroughly we endeavour to perform it—the more truthfully — the more we may expect a blessing on our efforts.

No doubt, however, it is a task, and even more, it is a trial; no task perhaps more hard, no trial for some more stern. For some there probably will be few periods in their life more exciting and more rememberable than when the eyes which have been from earliest youth invariably fixed on the Divine side of Scripture, are first presented with that side of it which is largely human. The new appearances thus opened to such are so little in accordance with their first instincts and confirmed habits of expectation, that they will be tempted, according as their natural timidity or curiosity predominate, either to turn back from investigation with tremulous aversion, or to pursue it with excited avidity. And herein very conceivably may be the greatest spiritual trial in all his life, of what manner of man the student is—the superficial or the deep—one whom the first step from the ignorance of childhood towards knowledge can affright or puff up, or one whose firm belief that GOD'S ways are higher than his, will keep steady in faith and humble in heart—willing to learn and living to know—until his own thoughts rise somewhat towards the height of those which are Divine.

If he be one of this latter kind, then after some while he will find that this first step was to him a shock only because it led him suddenly from a standing place which was almost a prison, into a freer air and a wider region where his soul was required quickly to expand to larger aspirations, and his eye to accustom itself to a broader light. He will then too soon find that he can breathe as freely and see as clearly in

this region as he could in the former, and that it is altogether one more invigorating and more noble. Having to do with facts of GOD's causing and not even of his own seeking, and wishing to know nothing but what GOD may please to teach him—Faith in GOD will gradually more and more assure him that it really is, and must be, better to see things as they are, than as any fancies of his own would arrange them to be; and as GOD has given him this exercise of his faith, he ought to do all he can that, through GOD's grace, it may tend to the strengthening of his soul. And not long will it be before he sees that his lot is not all trial —that it is largely blessing. Apart from the comfort of knowing that he is not shrinking from a task which GOD has appointed for him, he will find more and more that no study, of science or of scholarship, is so refreshing as that which thus leads him continually to contemplate those large human interests and those glimpses of the Divine counsels with which the Bible has to do throughout: while there is none which so elevates the soul and purifies the affections, by educing reverence and gratitude, as that which keeps him in constant communion with the greatest thoughts which have ever been uttered in human speech, and the noblest souls that have ever appeared in human flesh.

And as to such criticism producing scepticism, it would be difficult to show that the spiritual worth of men has hitherto been generally diminished in proportion as their study of Scripture has been extensive and profound, and that they have grown less believing and less reverent as they have grown more thoughful and more learned: while the history of religious sects has taught us that it has been the ignorance, and not the learning, of men—their folly,

and not their wisdom—which has been most frequently the chiefest source of mischief in their interpretation of Scripture. From causes already mentioned this latter case would seem only natural: but so also might it be as naturally expected that study of Scripture would lead to firmer faith rather than to greater unbelief. If indeed that which is the subject of study were really false at the centre though so seeming true, and if what appears so impressive to the unlearned were capable of being proved by the learned to be only imposing—then indeed the exposition of the hollowness of pretensions so great, without the discovery of anything more worthy of reverence within, might make the learned man an unbeliever, and a sceptic of the scholar. But when that which is studied is really and substantially, under all accidental and superficial imperfections, so much larger and deeper and purer than any mind which can study it—when every fresh insight into it as a whole cannot but inspire in all open minds faith anew—and when every addition to knowledge is calculated to call forth gratitude and to waken awe—the more studious of it a man becomes the more reverential also must he become. The mere pedant or sophist, it is true, may be, or do, anything quite the contrary of this: but such as these may be, or do anything, with or without learning: and in all these pages it is assumed that the student is conscious that he has a soul.

While, therefore, it is not by any means meant to deny that a thorough criticism involves in it many trials of our faith, it is meant to assert that a thorough criticism does not involve so many as that which is not thorough. It is perhaps principally at first, when the higher criticism is new to him, that a student is very much troubled by its

interference with his traditional belief. As his studies grow deeper and wider he generally begins to feel that the interior essential greatness of the Scriptures expands more rapidly than their exterior accidental vesture falls off from them, and that what remains is of a quality such as there is not elsewhere on earth.

And most distinctly ought it to be noted here, that these pages do not admit—they emphatically deny—that really so much has been done by the most modern criticism to change our views of the character of the Bible—either Old Testament or New—as was once supposed might be the case. Indeed it is here asserted that in much of the latest criticism there has been, amid exceeding erudition and the most remorseless logic, a very considerable amount of undue assumption and unwise argument: and such a continual magnifying of literal minutiæ as would seem to indicate the position of but the single talent of the mental microscope, rather than of that of a rich apparatus fitted alike for the wide sweep of celestial scenery, and the strictest scrutiny of a terrestrial atom. Indeed many of the assumptions and assertions of such criticism, it is believed, ought to be calmly and firmly, and may be justly and wisely, negatived and rebuked. There has been, too, very much of a mean, as well as of a minute, criticism lately brought to bear on the Sacred Writings: a certain worldliness of moral judgment, and a want of appreciation of the nobler and finer sentiments of humanity, which is quite unjust towards the essential characters of those who are thus judged. Let there be the freest and fullest application of all Eastern lights to the interpretation of Scriptural modes of thought and feeling, and let men bring to the

exposition and representation of Scriptural narrative all the knowledge they can acquire of nomade, and desert, and Palestinian life; but if they do this, and profess to do it, then also must we require of them to bring with them too the eastern and the southern soul—the noble impulses, the deep reverence, the burning love and hate—the faith and freedom and simplicity—which characterise the whole being there of patriarch and prophet, of warrior, rhapsodist, and ruler. Merely to bring antiquarian and philological learning, however oriental, to the study of the Scriptures, while the heart remains modern and northern, this is not the way to understand them really, either in their literal or their spiritual sense. To enter into the mere minds and natural feelings of the writers, there is need that the frigidity of the scholar be exchanged for the genial nature of the dweller in the open sunshine of heaven: and for all that is more than this, no due comprehension of such writings as those of either testament can ever be arrived at without something more than a mere knowledge of the external records of man's life however varied—without a certain experimental spirituality—a practical personal interest in the great problems of universal human nature, and a large sympathy with the deepest realities of many souls.

It would be well also to notice that the experience of some of the leaders of Biblical criticism in Christendom is now leading them to testify that many of the theories of their youth must be abandoned, and that a good deal of the outline of the old authorised creed on such points cannot at present have anything better substituted for it. For instance, later research has negatived the suspicion of the earlier, in the matter of the antiquity of alphabetic writing:

so that whereas once, not long ago, it was doubted whether such writing was known until long after Moses, few now find difficulty in believing that parts of the Pentateuch might have been written even long before his age. And in some other points the destructive criticism has destroyed itself: so that in some of the last criticism there is a marked retrogression towards the older creed: to some extent perhaps undue, in consequence of reaction from the excesses of speculation, but for the most part the result of a conviction of its positive truth confirmed by the failure of the great efforts made to subvert it. Mere critical scepticism is rapidly wearing itself out, while a scientific, yet spiritual scholarship, was never so active as now, or so productive of good fruits.

XLVI.

A plea for reverent criticism.

After all it might be said, that what is in these pages contended for is but a moderate and reasonable demand—a measure of liberty which can be considered dangerous or undue, only by those who have been accustomed to the endurance, or the exercise, of spiritual despotism. For most earnestly it must be stated that all freedom in spiritual things does not imply irreverence, nor does warfare against merely traditional impositions, however solemn, necessarily involve the sin of infidelity as to things more sacred. But let it be examined, whether to attribute the highest character of sanctity to words which do not claim it, and cannot be proved to be entitled to it, may not be the rather sin. If we push our theories of Divine influence beyond what is written of it, and from a fancied

honouring of GOD's Word believe what we think must be concerning it, instead of observing what GOD has ordained actually to be—we may well be met with the rebuke, Who hath required this at your hands? To regard that as Divine which is not Divine, or may not be so, this is of the essence of idolatry, or at least superstition: and surely these are spoken of in Scripture as sins more emphatically than are the dispositions to examine thoroughly into all claims to the supernatural, and the consequent judgment of such claims according to reason and to conscience. The adding to the words of GOD is denounced equally, we should remember, with the subtracting from them. To believe more and otherwise than GOD would have us, is no innocent or profitable exercise of faith: it may indeed have a show of wisdom in will-worship and humility, and neglecting of the mind, but not in any honour to the satisfying of the soul. Many of the books of the Old Testament are anonymous, and so are some of the New: and surely he who shall hesitate so to sanctify unknown men as to declare that their words are all the words of GOD, may deserve an expression of pity for the scrupulousness of his faith, but he cannot for this alone justly incur the imputation of irreverence.

If it be admitted that an authentic photograph of the Bible, with incontestably Divine signature and sanction attached, does not exist, and that we can but judge of what that original type was by a comparison of the points which the multiplied imperfect copies of it agree in testifying to, and from the merely probable claims which some copies have above others to be superior representations of it: if it be admitted that from other causes there must have

been, in the earliest copies, a considerable element of what is human connected even with the Holiest Scriptures—that the writing, and the language, and the style are human: and that so many natural influences have acted on the transmission of the Bible as we have it, and so many important points connected with it have been left without miraculous interposition, that we cannot say before examination what particular one may not have been—then the more we apply to the study of the Scriptures all the apparatus of the most thorough criticism the more worthily we treat them. The more we honour their authority as a whole, the more jealous we ought to be lest the reverence due to their essential spirit should be transferred to anything which may not duly claim equality with it. The more exclusively Scripture is appealed to as the ultimate and universal Law and Judge, and the more weight we are inclined to give to its lightest word, the more assured we ought to make ourselves that what we so honour is not the product of human infirmity, or the addition of mere human comment. In fact, as necessity has made us critics at all, reverence should make us severe ones—both as to what is Scripture and as to what Scripture is.

It would be well, then, if these things were considered, as they might tend to modify extreme claims of all sorts, which are at present producing serious injury to many. And assuredly some few there are whom it must be wrong to alienate, and for whom the moderate liberty contended for in these pages is absolutely necessary. They are such as have no wish to wander beyond the limits of the light of GOD's Revelation, but feel that man has set up his fences within these limits, and abridged the liberty which GOD in

CHRIST has allowed; and therefore taught from infancy to protest against allegiance in spiritual matters to merely human usurpations, and exhorted in other matters to stand fast in the liberty wherewith CHRIST has made them free, they are fretted until the unjust boundary line be removed, and the unevangelical dominion be retracted. They allow indeed that essentially the same belief respecting the fundamental truths of Judaism and of Christianity may be arrived at in either case: but while in the one it will be felt to be only arbitrarily imposed and very unjustly supported, in the other it will be adopted with a firm because a free conviction, and will be emancipated from cumbrous and injurious adjuncts which, however individually insignificant, make up for weight by number. And such as these deserve our thought and sympathy and help us much as any: noble vessels are they anchored to the rocky bottom of the ocean, but beating themselves to pieces for want of sea-room in our harbours.

XLVII.

Is the Bible thereby impoverished in significance?

If any should still think that such considerations as are advanced in these pages take away much from the richness and fulness of Scriptural Revelations, deprive many a passage of its long accustomed spiritual applications, and leave but a dry remainder of primary meaning instead of that which has ever afforded secondary supports of the greatest value to the believers of all ages—it would be well for such earnestly to meditate whether that can be necessary or edifying which is not true, and whether it be laudable to determine beforehand what significance Divine

utterances must have, or to suppose that by some inaccurate traditional adaptations all the profit of such utterances has been exhausted. But even if this should not be done, it might still more forcibly be replied, that the fact apparently is that large portions of the Jewish Scriptures are made up of that which was confessedly temporary, and is now absolutely abolished: that other large portions of them must, under any view of them, be considered only as very indirectly auxiliary to the formation of a maturely Christian mind: and also, that after all, there is another large portion from out of which no age or church has been able to extract any certain catholic truth.

But so long as we allow that the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures do contain Revelations from GOD to man, we cannot but also allow that they must be of quite infinite importance—modifying and enlarging man's sphere of spiritual existence immeasurably—and ever retaining a significance so expansive as to overtask all our powers of comprehension. They must assuredly afford us such new and large objects of thought as to form central portions of that wonderful scheme which the providence of GOD has ordained for the education and salvation of a portion of the human race. Though they may not be of exactly that character which the first thoughts of men may have anticipated—linking themselves on to the works of man more silently and more closely than they may have expected—yet no religious or enlightened mind will, after due contemplation, fail to perceive and acknowledge that they are the most Sacred Writings existing on earth, and that compared with the Revelations which they contain both of Deity and of humanity, the highest productions of merely

human culture are for the most part as mere darkness visible.

XLVIII.

Superiority of the Bible over all other sacred books.

To feel more forcibly the Divinity of the Bible it is only necessary to read other sacred books extant among men—or at the least translations of them. The chief and best of all such is Mohammed's Koran. This is indeed in some respects a wonderful work: in parts so awful and authoritative—of speech so passionless and stern—as articulate thunder from out of a clear sky: arousing as a trumpet-call, hurried as a battle-cry: grandly despotic. But though fragments of it be so noble, yet as a whole how inferior is it to any preceptive or prophetic portion of even the Hebrew Scriptures. For the most part a series of contemporaneous utterances, at once frivolous and monotonous: with no shape or sequence, no method or coherence. A book either of edicts and general orders, or of mere visions and rhapsodies: encouraging no investigation, precluding all discussion: so strict in commandment, so poor in principle: with no historical element in it, and no accommodative progression: of burning words indeed sometimes, but cold at the heart: without any largeness of sympathy, of pity, or of love. The Shasters and Vedas of the East—how cumbersome and how childish; with their tedious traditions and endless fables without morals: false in philosophy and yet not true in sentiment; dreamy, languid, and inane; affording no ground for faith, and inspiring no hope of progress. The most venerable books of the Chinese—not sacred but emphatically secular—maxims of prudence and of order and not laws of duty or of love—neither

Divine nor human, only conventional—no soul of man that feels itself immortal could feed itself on these. The Egyptian sacred sculptures indeed, could we read them better, might exhibit to us truer things than these, but all their wisdom would assuredly be found but a small part of that which comes to us through Moses: while when we turn to the most mature products of the minds of those classic nations who possessed no sacred writings, but who strove to work out the great problems of human destiny for themselves, and in so doing have indeed risen to a stature which, measured by any merely earthly standard, is the highest known among the races of mankind, we cannot but be impressed with the moral superiority of the very earliest elements of the Revelations of the Bible over the maturest productions of their most speculative minds. However much the Christian Scriptures may have taught us to consider but as elementary some of the representations of the Hebrew Scriptures, yet it is only in comparison with these that for one moment they can seem inferior to any writings extant among men. Considered in comparison with all the other literature and philosophy existing in the world which ever assumed to embody or exhibit a Revelation of truth or duty for man, they are so superior as to be generically different. They are emphatically Holy Scriptures, as well as Sacred.

For in no other writings is the infinite difference between right and wrong, good and evil, so invariably asserted, and so inflexibly upheld. Such uniform and clear declaration of the Unity of GOD and of His claims on the hearts of His creatures—such mingled manifestations of His goodness and severity—as at once the Lawgiver and the Father

—showing mercy to the transgressor, and yet vindicating always the majesty of law—where elsewhere shall we find the like? And such revelations of humanity too: such inculcation of man's present unworthiness and weakness, and misery, and yet such assertion of his original dignity and potential worth; such cultivation of the conscience: such exhibition of prayer and obedience, of penitence and faith and love, as means of grace: these things, and such as these, mark off even the older volume of our Scriptures from all the writings of Heathenism by a distance we cannot measure.

With whatever elements of human imperfection some portions of them may have been permitted to be associated, yet no one can honestly read any of those parts of the Hebrew writings which make claim to be direct Revelation, without feeling that there is that in them which rebukes sin and exhorts to holiness—which recognises in man high responsibilities, and everywhere impresses the omnipresent Providence of GOD. And those imperfections and inferiorities of historic detail, what are they but the links and threads which bind on the actual to the ideal—which form that only junction of the Divine and the human which can convey the light and life of the one so as to be received by the other influentially, but without shock or injury? What wonderful communion have we thus not only with what is altogether above us, but also with spirit through the flesh. The Scriptures are indeed often as the opening of the heavens, calling us to listen to words the like of which never have arisen, or could have arisen, from the earth; but even here though the message is Divine, the Voice which speaks it and the language spoken are ever as the

speech of man, and the mind that has to receive it needs not to be unclothed but only clothed upon.

Thus is the Bible, while a Revelation of the Divine, ever full of human interest and human sympathy—of love and light and life: no unimpassioned, cold, clear, philosophy or morality: no system, no code: neither only truths delivered as oracles, nor mere commandments written on Tables of stone, but a history as well as a Revelation: a Religion written on the fleshly tablets of man's heart, to be learnt by reverence and to be obeyed by love. From the first page of it to the last it preserves this same gracious mode of teaching us—unfolding gradually the same great scheme by means of the greatest variety of operations—presenting us with all kinds of character and scenery, all sorts and conditions of men: sublime yet practical: rousing dormant energies, sowing truths; its doctrines distilling as dew, its pleadings penetrating like light: ever connecting earth with heaven, as it were by ascending and descending angels, and binding up the revelations of man's highest destinies and duties with the most truthful records of his sufferings and his sins. True it is that it is not a complete history of mankind, but principally of one people only; and unquestionably there are considerable developments of human nature which are not treated of by it at all: but still the Bible is a book which treats of most things visible as well as of so many things invisible: a book which registers the first Creation of the world as well as predicts its last day: a book which in its earliest pages, written it may be a thousand years before those of any book now existing in the world, contains almost the whole authentic history that we have of the infancy of our race; and which

in its course of narrative, though it be chiefly concerned with the History of the Hebrews, brings before us specimens of almost every variety of man and every type of character, from the East and from the West—making us citizens of this world in our training for a higher citizenship above. Thus mingling human sympathies with Divine instructions, and linking on the unknown to the known—the Bible of GOD is as full of grace as it is of truth, and speaks to us as the very Messiah Himself, with a self-evidencing Divinity, because speaking as man never spake.

But amidst all this variety, what unity of spirit and of aim is there in the Bible: the representations of GOD though continually progressive, yet always so in the same direction of holiness and love, and the history of man, though always exhibiting him sinful, yet never as hopelessly degraded. A Revelation spreading itself over fifteen centuries, and uniformly growing and brightening—gradually lessening its own shadows, and at last changing itself into perfect day—herein lies a testimony as to whence it came which it is impossible to gainsay. And though written by nearly fifty writers of every order and condition—kings and shepherds, warriors and fishermen, priests and publicans—separated from each other by intervals of long centuries—we recognise the same characteristic tone throughout: uniformly leaving on the mind an impression of the Holiness of GOD and of the capacity of humanity—which to this day the most enlightened feel it a task intellectually to master, and an impossibility practically to surpass.

And more than this: In all Scripture there is a centre: there is a transcendent object which all its prophecy pre-

dicts and all its history tends to introduce. All the events and personages—the Patriarchs, the Law, and the Prophets, and the Apostles—are but as the circumference of this, and derive all their glory from it as the planets from the solar fire. And He who thus stands where all the converging lines of Scripture meet, is the Messiah of Humanity as well as of the Jews—the Son of GOD and the Son of Man. Thus the Bible vindicates itself as the Law and the Gospel of our race—as the earliest and the last communication from Heaven—as all that ever has been, or ever shall be, supernaturally written for our learning—as at once the final Revelation of GOD and the whole duty of man.

XLIX.

This superiority only enhanced by the principles here advocated.

It is therefore with no intention of diminishing men's reverence for Holy Scripture as a whole—how far from it—that the suggestions of these pages are made as to the relative value of certain portions of them; but rather only with the purpose of directing their attention from a view of these writings—believed to be indeed most sacred—which has been found productive of extensive error, to another which it is thought may be preventive of many of those unhappy controversies and contradictions which have ever been the stumbling-blocks of the inquiring and the scandals of the believing. And truly, did the traditional notions concerning the sacredness of the letter lead men generally to magnify proportionately the Divine Spirit which resides in it, it might be well to leave more intellectually accurate conceptions of Revelation to grow up when they should seem more needed. But it is

the deep conviction that the Scriptures are really not duly honoured, and men's growth in spirituality of mind is materially impeded, by such notions, which induces the desire and the endeavour to suggest a juster way of considering a subject so important. The history of ecclesiastical and theological controversies, read with special observation of the use made of Scripture in them, seems to prove that there is scarcely any folly of the human mind which cannot find some sentence or phrase of Scripture to which it may attach itself with not more obvious inaptness than has characterised the advocacy of many important truths by the ablest controversialists who have proceeded on the theory of the Revelation of the letter. The errors which not only good men, but the best, it may be, of other times have made in the interpretation of Scripture on this assumption—errors which are now confessed to be wholly such by good men of these times—ought to be often in our memory to moderate our dogmatism, and to teach us many a sad lesson of wisdom. And surely it would seem incredible that the Oracles of GOD should thus give such uncertain, and even discordant, responses if rightly consulted and rightly interpreted. And that the source of the error has not always been in the disposition of the inquirer is evident from this, that men equally eminently devout, and most intensely earnest and sincere, have come away from their worship and their study with conclusions exactly contrary to each other. We therefore infer—and a happy inference it is to be permitted honestly to make—that the error has for the most part arisen rather from the manner of the interrogation than from the spirit of the inquirer—from the imperfection of the method

of interpretation rather than from the essential ambiguity of the response.

Most necessary it is, therefore, very frequently and clearly to repeat, that mere piety will not suffice for the acquisition of the details of sacred wisdom, any more than mere genius will suffice for the mastery of the minutiæ of learning or of science. Piety is principally compounded of reverence and of love, and both of these are proverbially not quick-sighted, save in the discerning of spirit. For the interpretation of the letter, faculties of another kind are required to be added, before the spirit can be duly disengaged from it. There is no doubt indeed that the simply pious reader of the Bible, of average intellect and very limited education, will even have a power of insight into the substance and aim of Revelation which the irreverent or the insincere will never be able to attain. An uniform consistent course of endeavour to do the will of GOD as far as it is known—to live according to the light he has, and to seek continually for more—this is as sufficient, as it is necessary, to secure personal blamelessness in a man's study of Scripture.

But he who aspires to more than this—he who would understand more than the mere outline of GOD'S Revelation and its spirit—must add earnest thoughtfulness, if not enlightened scholarship, to even the sincerest and maturest piety. And it is to be feared that some of the most devout are not in the habit of doing this, and yet undertake to expound the details of the Divine councils dogmatically. They seem often to have come to the study of the Divine Oracles with prepossessions as to the kind of answer they must certainly receive so strong that no opposing realities

have been patiently regarded by them, and only those which could be made readily to conform themselves to their preconceptions have been duly attended to. Unintentionally, but actually for themselves, they have limited the Holy One in His modes of manifestation, and by having no other expectation but that His ways must be as their ways, and His speech as their speech, they have slighted or perverted much that He has condescended to reveal. They have often so magnified some parts of the communication as to make them contradict the spirit and significance of the whole: making so much of each separate member as to be unconscious of that symmetry of the body in which lay the chiefest worth: and if one may so say, by not recognising the essential deadness of the letter they have remained unconscious of the vital energy of the spirit.

L.

The Scriptures contain an everlasting revelation, and lead us to perfect faith in God Himself.

Finally: there are two quite different, if not opposite, sides from which the study of the Bible may be approached, and the views of these pages will necessarily be very differently regarded by those who may come to them from the one side, and by those who may come to them from the other. To each of these two classes, a few words in conclusion.

Those who have been accustomed from earliest youth to regard the Bible as a collection of continuous contemporaneous utterances of a Divine Voice—the nominally different and distant authors having but the same relation to that Heavenly Dictator as different instruments or amanuenses might have to any human author—and who,

in addition to this, have been practically accustomed to consider all Scriptural sayings as of such ample and germinant significance that they may at any time be detached from their primary associations, and interpreted independently, without fear of their being thus inappropriately, or in any way unduly, applied—such as these must indeed regard the views presented in these pages of the significance and authority of the Bible as so inadequate as to be altogether deserving of vehement dissent and zealous protest.

Indeed it can hardly be otherwise than that many of such must be offended at these sayings, and some may stumble at them : and were the statement of such opinions the indulgence of any mere desire to improve the intellectual condition of those who are practically the most pious, they might well be postponed to a more convenient season. But to such as these they are professedly not primarily addressed ; and larger interests are felt to be involved in these questions than the possible improvement, or necessary unsettling, of the intellectual consistency of a portion of a creed of the most Christian. But even to such it may now be said—as there are few who will wish to say it more sympathetically—that a reconsideration of their views on these subjects would be wise—for their own sake probably, and certainly for their children's—and that they can have no reasonable assurance that their belief in so large and complex a subject needs from time to time no modification. The course of discussion and the progress of opinion on this matter are more and more pressing upon them the necessity of at least abstaining from dogmatism and denunciation ; for if, because unable themselves to

come out of the bondage of the letter into the freedom of the spirit, they seek to subjugate others to the same yoke, they will assuredly find that they will be doing grievous harm to many thoughtful and truthful minds—driving the weaker into secret scepticism and the stronger into indignant protest.

And it is also wished to tell them that by taking such low and legal and unspiritual views of the Revelation of GOD as those of the literalists are, they are hindering the freer and fuller development of the Gospel, and retarding instead of promoting the furtherance of the Redeemer's kingdom among men. With the best possible intentions, it may be, but still with the least possible insight, they speak of the Bible so much more in conformity with their natural notions of what it ought to be than with other men's observation of what it is, and give themselves up so uninquiringly to mere traditions concerning it rather than to facts, that they are casting unnecessary stumbling-blocks in the way of many of their brethren who, if weaker in faith, are stronger in understanding than themselves, and yet are willing to enter upon the conditions of discipleship with hearts as honest and as earnest as any. And really it cannot be either right or good for themselves to keep hold of what is not fact as if it were so, however unsettling and inconvenient it may be to surrender early and long maintained prepossessions; and for their children, who cannot grow up with the same firmness of faith in the same views, it would be especially well that they should not have the trial of looking upon any unnecessary infirmities of their fathers.

To warn such of danger, and to offer them assistance to

escape from it, and then to afford them such other suggestive aids as may reconcile them to their change of position, and enable them to walk steadily there where now they do not think it possible for them to walk at all—this surely can be but a work of spiritual charity. And such seem to require to be distinctly, though kindly, told that the spiritual world cannot, any more than the natural, be made all smooth; that the tone of nerve which is the result of vigorous exercise in the open air of heaven, and hardy struggle with rude fact, is far healthier, and more maturely Christian too, than that which comes by avoiding every wind of doctrine which does not blow from a favourite quarter, and sitting passive under shelter which is also shadow; and that GOD has provided for the growth, as much as for the comfort, of His children in that final Revelation which He has given them of Himself.

But though it be true that the more one educated from the first in the low literal view of Divine Influence searches the Scriptures, the more he will find what will not agree with this view, and that at the end of every seven years of daily study he will feel himself further and further removed from his original standing point, yet it is also true that he will feel the firmness of the foundation of his faith more than proportionately assured to him: that his reliance on GOD's Wisdom and Grace will have grown more strong as his comprehension of GOD's ways has grown more intelligent; and that whereas in times past particular doubts and difficulties produced a fear which had torment, now it will have come to pass more and more that his essential faith in GOD's Revelation will be such that he can look with a mere literary curiosity on those problems of its

record which he cannot even hope to solve. Such rest indeed comes only after labour; but truly it may be said that such rest is sweet: sweeter far than any which unhealthful indolence, or inactive timidity, can supply: a rest as of standing upon a Rock—of dwelling under the shadow of the Most High.

But there are others who approach the study of the Bible from quite a different quarter—persons who either having never been educated in feelings towards it much more reverential than those which they have learnt to entertain towards many of the masterpieces of human genius, are too little spiritually earnest to investigate its claims more deeply: or who having been once taught to regard the Bible as in the letter equally Divine as in the spirit, have since discovered that something of the letter is certainly little more than human, and therefore infer that something of the spirit may be no more so too; and such as these will probably regard the views presented in these pages as but very imperfectly approximating to the most enlightened freedom.

Such persons are here assured by one who has studied the writings of both volumes of the Bible, long and often—under various conditions of mind, and from points of view as wide asunder as possible for the same object to be retained in sight—that he believes that there is no moral truth more certain than that the Bible is as a whole generically different from all other books—and that it has been given by the special Providence of GOD to be to men an indispensable and sufficient guide for them to the knowledge and love of Himself. The New Testament appears to him, after every fresh examination of the

criticism which has been brought against it, to be substantially a self-authenticating Revelation of GOD: and the Old Testament, after the same, to be a Divinely-provided introduction to the New—truly prophesying and testifying of CHRIST, and being as a schoolmaster to lead us unto Him. Some portions, indeed, of the Scriptures, when taken separately, may appear imperfect, but when carefully considered in their due relations, they will be seen to form the terms of a series which the Providence of GOD has surely superintended. To one thus viewing them there will eventually disclose itself an unity of plan and of spirit pervading the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelations—binding both volumes into one, and developing a scheme which surely yet naturally—with continual apparent frustration indeed of immediate processes, but with certain progress towards the accomplishment of its ultimate aim—proves itself Divine: for nothing can well be conceived more self-evidently under more than mortal governance than that which equably develops itself, and forms itself into one living and growing whole, during a period which includes within it some fifty generations of mankind. Viewed as thus unfolding itself, with perpetual fresh increase of vitality for so long, and when ceasing to grow giving birth to a Dispensation of things the full significance of which we feel to be yet inexhaustible, the Bible cannot but appear, notwithstanding the fullest recognition of its human elements, a Book emphatically Divine—such as there is not elsewhere on earth; different not only in degree but in kind from all others; and one which when rightly read can do what none other can—make men wise unto salvation.

And some too can assuredly say that the Bible possesses the power of so enlightening the eyes and elevating the thoughts—of so cultivating the conscience and so purifying the affections—that they cannot but feel it their own fault alone if they are not translated by the study of it into a higher order of life than otherwise they could be, and if their spiritual nature does not grow by it into some participation of the Divine. For the deepest longings of their souls—for their inmost sense of sinfulness and shame—for their keenest joys and noblest aspirations—they find in it a satisfaction and a sympathy which exceed all they can desire. They are conscious of so great a grandeur and dignity and solemnity in its mode of treating the invisible world, and so healthy a reality and daylight justness in its mode of dealing with the world that is visible—a holiness so mingled everywhere with love when speaking of GOD and an actual sinfulness and a potential nobleness so uniformly recognised in man—that it seems to them to evidence its own Divinity by the understanding which it gives them of GOD and of themselves.

And lastly, let it be said, that those who feel the Bible to be this can well be content to allow it to be also sometimes something less. He who is a spiritual man can afford to be also an intellectual freeman. Verily the essential Scriptures need not be approached by any man with a perpetual apology at every step for his unavoidable exhibition of superior wisdom. No: rather let a man sit down to the study of the Bible with the largest cultivation possible for him, and with all his gifts of intellect in complete activity: let him shrink from no investigation: let him conceal no error that he can detect: mutilating no

endowment of his understanding and giving the freest exercise to every spontaneous instinct of his heart: let him do this—but do it with the earnestness of one who feels that he is thereby determining the destinies of his own soul, and with the modesty of one who remembers that the domain of his ignorance is large—and then let him weigh well the proportions of the Human and the Superhuman in the Scriptures, and there need be no fear but that the preponderating elements will enable him to declare from the heart, that the Bible is essentially a Revelation from GOD.

THE END OF THE THIRD BOOK.

CATHOLIC THOUGHTS

THE FOURTH BOOK

THEOLOGY.

THEOLOGY.

I.

Theology, or the study of the relations between God and man.

THEOLOGY is impossible as a Science, and must ever be imperfect as a System—if by Theology be understood, as is the case in these pages, a demonstration, or logically connected exposition, of the relations subsisting between GOD and man, and of the Divine plans and purposes in the government of the moral universe. For the Infinite and the Unknown enter so largely into the essential elements of such speculations as to render the full solution of any proposition in so great a scheme, whether considered as a Theorem or a Problem, hopelessly indeterminate. The indefiniteness of our idea of GOD and the incompleteness of our history of man—these alone present insuperable difficulties to the formation of any satisfactory theory of the Divine and human relations. The two deepest convictions of man's heart—and the indispensable assumptions of all Religion—are such as in their co-existence cannot be reconciled to man's understanding, namely, that GOD is Omnipotent and that man is free. The existence of evil, too, in any form or measure, under the supremacy of a Being equally and infinitely wise and good and powerful, is so complete a contradiction to

the very axioms of the understanding that no arrangement of moral phenomena which the intellect can devise can possibly appeal to us with any logical consistency, or with any self-authenticating authority. And by no conceivable means can we hope to get rid of this fundamental and all-pervading mystery in the moral universe: for the recognition of the reality of good and evil, and of the essential contrariety of the two, lies at the very foundation of the morality of humanity, alone rendering any moral judgments significant, or even possible: and it would seem that exactly in proportion as we disallow the existence of evil, we are obliged at the same time to disallow the existence of good.

This one consideration alone ought to be sufficient to make us cautious in all theological speech. But there are so many other sources of difficulty and uncertainty that none other but a suggestive and tentative and hypothetical tone can be at all tolerable to the thoughtful. And one would think that to any commonly religious mind it would seem the only reverent assumption, that revealed truth is not yet possessed in anything like its fulness or its purity by any mind, and that therefore theology, if it is to be termed a Science, must be considered one continually liable to modifications from the experience and the acquisitions, the knowledge and the thought, of every age as it passes by. The ground-plan of the Universe—the idea according to which it is—this abides as yet with its Maker: and until we possess some all-comprehending Revelation of it—which will scarcely be in the flesh—the conceptions which we may form of any unrevealed part of it will be liable to continual change, as our views of that which is, or may be, revealed or discovered, alter and enlarge.

Theologies hitherto have been as imperfect approximations to the whole truth as it must exist in the Divine Idea as Astronomies are to the true theory of the whole heavens—and very much more so. The vault of Revelation, it may be, exhibits less than a hemisphere of truths, and there is no probability now that our horizon should ever be much greater than it is: but the systems which have hitherto been made have been constructed out of mere parts and sections of that which is revealed, and in proportion as they have been made symmetrical, have been made so by leaving out more of such portions than they have included. They have not been able to make the Revelations of GOD'S works to harmonise with those of His Word, and have succeeded in producing a coherency of system very chiefly by ignoring some of the greatest difficulties in the history of man.

And it might be worth thinking of, whether we can hopefully attempt to systematise into one coherent whole, facts which are not all of the same kind, but of professedly opposite kinds. In philosophies of Nature we have to deal with facts all analogous and harmonious, and concerning which the difficulties arise merely from extreme variety and complexity: but in Revelation, we have to do with facts differing from our experience elsewhere, and not analogous to it: acts of the Divine Will which contradict much of our natural expectation, or at least transcend it —phenomena which admit of no explanation—objects of pure Faith.

Our theology, doubtless, may and must become more mature; it may, and must, that is, in some sense grow towards a certain ultimate condition of clearness. And

when we reflect how differently every educated man is now obliged, without any additional direct Revelations, to think of his position in the world and in the Universe, from what the great majority of our predecessors could but think of theirs, we cannot but admit much sure progress in the past; and are almost inevitably induced to imagine that a time may come when our present conceptions may be as inadequate theoretically for others as the Judaic are now for us. The veil which hides the Divine and the Future from us has ever hitherto been, by GOD'S grace, growing gradually thinner from the Fall until now; but perchance there is a limit to its transparency not inconceivably distant for all that are in the flesh.

II.

Theology a need of man's nature.

But if so hopeless be the expectation of ever arriving at any complete, or even satisfactory, theory of the moral Universe, it may be said, why may we not sweep away all Theology whatsoever, and resolve Christianity into a system of practical Morality? First and always because Christianity is given to the whole man, and his practical morality is but a part of him. Man has an ineradicable love of truth, and craving for knowledge, combined with his other tendencies, and the doctrines of Christianity are admirably adapted to exercise and to satisfy these: and a due comprehension of them tends ever more and more to change the motives of his actions, and the whole complexion of his character, and thus at once to elevate his standard of duty and his power of obedience, until at length his education becomes devotion, and his morality

is transfigured into Religion. To see and feel our relations to GOD and to the world somewhat as they are seen and felt at the centre of all—this is a blessed approximation in one respect to the Divine likeness, and an incipient participation of the Divine nature. All truth ennobles, and some sanctifies: and the knowledge of GOD to the earnest in heart leads to the love of Him. Any knowledge of the Divine Mind—of its disposition and purposes, and plans—this must always be the highest glory for a man: and to grow into harmony with these through an adoring contemplation and a reverend obedience, this must always be his highest happiness. Therefore if something much less than scientific, or even systematic, completeness be looked for, theological speculations may be very far from unprofitable. We find indeed that the very noblest minds have in all ages engaged in them with interest and with hope: and that scarcely ever is a mind raised beyond the ordinary level of the earthly, but it frames for itself some outline of a theory which may render intellectually coherent and significant its fragmentary perceptions and experiences of moral truth. The entire history of mental cultivation in all countries shows that there is a strong enduring tendency in men to frame a Theology which shall be a help to them in harmonising their minds when they dwell upon the nature and Providence of GOD, and the purpose of their own being, and its destiny; while every age of the Christian Church exhibits the like earnest and long-continued endeavour to bring the peculiar Revelations of the Gospel into conformity with, if not within the comprehension of, their previously and independently existing convictions. In all ages, in fact, ancient and modern,

there has been an aspiration in men to have their whole mental and moral being brought into unity, by tracing the logical necessity of, or at least reasonable connection between, the objects of their faith and the course of their own consciousness and life; and even to seek after a hidden unity in all things that have been believed to be the products of the same creative and all-ruling Will. In the early ages of the Church this is especially conspicuous, for we there see Dogma take such hold of the minds of men that they could sit in Council while they believed the world to be fast coming to an end, to deliberate on and to debate mysteries which even angels could not unequivocally decide: and in these very latest days in which we live, the highest mental excitation which has been produced has been by the promulgation of Philosophies which only the very few find it possible to comprehend.

It is admitted, then, that a Theology, in as far as it is an attempt to learn a part of the counsels of GOD in the government of His Universe—to think as GOD thinks and to feel as He feels more and more in relation to all spirit—is a noble effort, and one which may indeed be profitable, if only it be engaged in with a profound sense that it is but a fraction of those counsels which can ever be understood by man. So long as man's classifications of the Divine counsels are considered simply as tentative and provisional, so long may they be received with a ready and a hopeful interest: but if they be propounded as authoritative and conclusive, they ought to be met with a prompt and a firm resistance. Nothing can be more presumptuous—and therefore more irreligious—than to claim for any human arrangement of Divine Revelations a reverence of the

same kind as that which we are required to pay to the Revelations themselves; or when Revelation has been given us only unsystematically, to require as essential that it should be received only systematically.

The only worthy way in which we can engage in any studies of the Divine is to let go human systems as much as may be, and to take hold of all Divine facts and revelations which we can in any way arrive at, and many more than we can arrange and account for: we must study man in all his history, and GOD in all His works and ways as well as in His Word: we must both view Religion in the light of the intellect and sanctify our science by associating its laws with the Divine Will: we must make the base of our theology as broad and deep as fact and truth of all kinds, and build it up with materials as everlasting as the experiences and necessities and aspirations of the human soul; and doing this in all simplicity and sincerity of heart, we shall edify ourselves and all who in the same spirit look upon our work or listen to our words.

III.

Various theological systems. Physical Theology.

Systems of Theology have been framed of very various materials, and founded upon very different bases: principally on those of a recognition of design and adaptation in the material and organised portions of the visible universe —which may be termed Physical Theology; on a study of the mental and moral constitution of man individually and historically—which may be termed Metaphysical Theology: and on that of the peculiar Revelations of the Bible—which may be termed Biblical Theology. But each and all of

these—separately or combined—are incomplete as a satisfying exposition of the counsels of GOD respecting even some of the more prominent and pressing difficulties by which we are met in any survey of the moral Universe.

Physical Theology, which has been pursued in these last ages with such singular success that it has become almost a characteristic achievement of the modern mind, is indeed, so far as its region extends, a most interesting and most profitable contribution to our religious knowledge. But its region extends only as far as our acquaintance with Nature extends—and Nature manifests itself to us only through our senses. But all that the senses know of, or can learn, is finite, and must ever be so: and we need to know of the infinite. But how pass from the finite to the infinite? By faith, and not by logic. And not only this: though the Physical Philosopher can render very impressive the necessity of a first cause, he cannot do much towards the demonstration of the Personality and Morality of a supreme Will: and a Philosophical First Cause is no object of worship, and therefore can be no foundation for a Religion. We do not, indeed, know historically that the idea of a Personal and Moral Deity has ever arisen in men's minds from the mere contemplation of external Nature. The idea of a Creator, indeed, is one to which mere observation could never lead, for there is nothing analogous to it in human experience. There is, too, no necessary likeness between the operations and designs of the human and the Divine: rather the very notion of such operations and designs seems a contradiction: inasmuch as it presupposes and implies some limitation and resistance external to Deity. But if we make these first great assumptions, then there may be

traced many analogies in various departments of material and sentient nature which confirm them, and the illustrations, rather than proofs, of some attributes of GOD which may be thence derived are of exceeding beauty and of the highest worth. But still in that region in which man is, and ever must be, most interested—the region which is not only material and sentient but also moral—the differences and contradictions predominate over the analogies. There is no necessary sequence—there is no discoverable connexion—between the material and the spiritual—the merely sentient and the responsible—portions of the Universe : and there would seem to be a generic difference, and even a direct contrariety, between the sinless and the sinful. The whole dealing of Physical Theology is with law and order, and beauty and life : it has no account to give either of the reason or of the remedy of transgression and disorder, of pain or of death : and with these man has so much to do, that whatever omits all solution or consideration of these, leaves untouched the most interesting problems of human destiny, and must therefore be wholly inadequate both to man's wants, and to any influential Revelation of the Divine Nature. Nature at best, in fact, speaks merely of law and not of love, of order and not of Providence : and only when read by a light borrowed from the heart of man, does it manifest to us a harmony of moral as well as of material adaptation.

And Immortality—what can Physical Theology prove concerning this? It transcends all personal experience, and contradicts all analogies of Nature. And yet without this, what is Religion? only Morality, if that.

IV.

Metaphysical Theology.

Metaphysical Theology occupies a much more promising position, and undertakes to perform a much more difficult work. It professes and endeavours to deduce necessary laws of the Divine Nature and government from observation of, and reasoning from, the essential constitution of human nature. Assuming a necessary sameness between the mind of GOD and the mind of man, it attempts to unfold a scheme of GOD's government of all His Universe, according to its conception of how a perfect human mind might be supposed to govern that small portion of it of which it can be cognisant. And doubtless this is all that it is possible for a human mind to do, and in so far as it extends it may be right: at least man has no more ineradicable conviction—no more assured certainty—than that certain principles of action, and certain moral distinctions of which he is conscious, must be eternal and universal—unlimited in their obligation and application by any considerations of time and space.

In this metaphysical region then—having to do with that which is all alike in kind, and to argue concerning Infinite Spirit from finite spirit and not from mere sense—the theological problem is more hopeful—the method more efficient. Indeed the more we merge metaphysical in moral philosophy, the more cogent become the arguments for the existence of a moral and personal Deity—such a Deity alone as the whole man can worship. Metaphysics by themselves cannot define the idea of GOD without contradictions. An Infinite Person, how define or conceive of this? Truly the unlimited personality of GOD is an idea

which no Philosophy can deal with. All philosophies ancient and modern, and all religions except Judaism and Christianity, and their derivative Mahommedanism, dissipate and merge the personality of GOD in the infinity of the Universe, and thus become Pantheistic: and this chiefly because they are merely inductions of the understanding from Nature. The Personality of Godhead is the idea which is the indispensable root of all practical Religion, and this idea is no logical deduction or demonstration: but has its origin, and its proof, in man's own consciousness of a will. This will indeed is a mystery to us, but it is one self-authenticating: and this, it may be, alone gives us the conception of a Personal Creator; while what we call our conscience—or perception of good and evil—gives us the persuasion of a Moral Governor. Our whole nature, too, feels itself a derived, and limited, and conditional existence: it is conscious that it did not give to itself its life, nor the laws of its life, and it longs for the unconditional and the unlimited—the Author and Giver of its life and of all life: and this instinctive sense of dependence, and this longing for what is higher and better than itself—these things are for us large presumptive evidence of the existence of the essential Ideal and Archetype of all that is good and great, and conjoined with the consciousness of a will and the law of conscience constitute the elements of that idea of Deity which is, through worship, capable of regenerating the whole nature of man. The evidence indeed thus afforded lacks much of demonstration, but it is of a nature which is harmonious with Revelation, and confirmatory of it, because anticipating it. And thus Philosophy while it seeks to discover the First Cause of all existence, and inquires into

the reality of the Highest Perfection, and determines the great primary laws of moral obligation, becomes a fitting introduction to Theology and a portion of it: while Revelation in so far as it sanctions, and develops the idea of GOD thus pointed to, and manifests the connection between the counsels of GOD and the destiny of man, and recognises everywhere the grand assumption of man being in the image of GOD, descends to a region to which such Philosophy may rise. But though in their nature thus allied, they are not in their present stage at all coincident with each other: they may very conceivably become more and more so hereafter —the regions they respectively occupy having points of frequent contact, and the courses they respectively pursue seeming often to point in the same direction—but the final amalgamation of the two is to be looked forward to only among the results of an indefinitely remote development.

V.

Biblical Theology.

Biblical Theology professes to be constructed of the materials which the declarations of a written Revelation supply, put together with the least possible additions of human elements: and is thus founded on a basis of faith rather than of reasoning. It does not indeed exclude the province of the understanding: for it necessarily depends for a knowledge of what is Revelation and what is not, upon a rational interpretation of documents written by human hands in human language: and the systematic form which it gives to the doctrines it discovers, is also due to human logic. But such Theology labours under two difficulties at the least which seem insuperable, so far as concerns

the construction of any theory of GOD's government of His moral Universe which can be in any sense called complete, or even only coherent. The first of these difficulties is, that the ideas which are characteristic of the written Revelation are of such transcendant significance that no human thought can deal with them as factors in any intellectual or moral calculations—as necessary antecedents or sequents in any logical deductions: and the other is, that Revelation does not give us sufficient data of its own kind with which to form a theory even only of human destiny. It explains nothing of some of the great mysteries which are involved in all the fundamental problems of humanity, and reveals but little of the final future. Revelation, in fact, always proposes to man, and to men, human life and destiny as a Problem rather than a Theorem, and enters into nothing but what is necessary to be known in order that it may be done; all questions concerning the causes and ultimate consequences of what is, being postponed indefinitely. For instances: the original cause of evil, and the relation of man's will to GOD's as to the measure of his freedom and responsibility, and the reason of it, Revelation does not tell us: nor indeed does it teach us definitely anything concerning the plans of GOD respecting a great majority of the human race—what has been the amount of moral law they have lived under and are living under now, and what is to be the issue of their life on earth. And Biblical Theology can legitimately extend no farther than Revelation does. But a Theology which has nothing to say to the destiny of almost all mankind, whatever other merits it may have, cannot justly be considered as any science of humanity, or of Divinity either: or at the very least is so little of

a science itself that it cannot rightly presume to make other sciences its subjects. Had the Bible, indeed, been a book written by the finger of GOD throughout, and professedly a complete exposition of all the elements of spiritual things intelligible by man, and in a language universally self-interpreting—then indeed a Biblical Theology might have been the most perfect of all possible sciences for man, and might have marked off without fear and broadly the precise boundaries of obligatory belief; it might have set at rest large questions which continually exercise, and often agitate the human mind: and might have raised us to a height of intellectual comprehension of the purposes of GOD which should have made us walk here on earth almost by sight. But the Bible is so different from this—and our present mental condition is so different too—that it seems only necessary to state such a supposition, to force upon the mind by its obvious contrast to the fact, how far any deduction from it must be from coinciding with our present possibilities.

VI.

Biblical Theology —its relation to systems of Philosophy.

But whatever be the possibilities of the case, the fact certainly is this, that we find in all Theologies characteristically Biblical a large amount of dogma which is not the pure result either of Revelation or of reason. Many articles of belief which have prevailed throughout Christendom for ages, and are now very generally received, are certainly not such as we have delivered to us in express words in the Bible, nor are they such as we are instinctively inclined to believe, or such as we can at all rigorously demonstrate: they are the relics of early traditions, or the products of

human speculation. Theology in every age has been affected very largely by the existing state of knowledge and philosophy: and the insight and general vision of each age has hitherto varied not only with the strength of the eye, but also with the extent of the horizon. No person can be at all qualified to pronounce judgments upon matters of traditional Theology, who has not learned to recognise and distinguish the varying philosophical elements in the growing creeds of Christendom: and he who has done this with the most care and accuracy will probably see that so considerable has now become the accumulation of mere inference from Revelation, and of tradition and philosophy, even in the creeds of its purest churches, that for those who believe that the Scriptures contain all the truth which it is essential to salvation to receive, and that the tendency of tradition and speculation is rather to corrupt than to clarify Scriptural exposition, it has become obligatory often to recur to the special Revelation, and to study it awhile exclusively, in order to gain afresh such an impression of its characteristic peculiarities as may enable the mind to discriminate decisively between consonant and dissonant additions. Indeed it must seem wise to all, as thus in the course of ages even the strictest Biblical Theology has a tendency to grow confused by the multitude of heterogeneous additions made to it by the diverse philosophies of the ages through which it passes, that from time to time the chief and central truths of Revelation should be brought out into prominent vision, in order that we may not fall into the fearful evil of having the commandments of CHRIST made of none effect through the philosophies of men. In this way alone shall we be able ever to keep the ground-plan of the Divine building so

clearly before us as that we may be enabled always, if not to decide with positiveness on a multitude of details, yet to discern with assurance what were the designs of its principal parts, and some of their many interdependent connections.

Systems of Theology, too, even those professedly Biblical, when logically consistent and followed out to their legitimate consequences, frequently lead to doctrinal results which only require to be cursorily compared with the general spirit of the New Testament, to be felt to be false: and the more frequently this is the case, the more confirmed becomes our conviction of the inexpediency and incompatibility of that union of human logic with Divine Revelation which has so long been prevalent. For instances: It has been repeatedly and dogmatically asserted, by deductions rigorous enough from certain assumptions concerning the physical transmission of spiritual corruption, combined with certain interpretations of the letter of Scripture, that the salvation of infants dying unbaptised is impossible, and their eternal misery inevitable: and from assumptions and reasonings concerning the necessary attributes of GOD, connected with other interpretations of Scripture, it has been taught that myriads of immortal spirits must of necessity be condemned to the same hopeless fate, without ever having had even offered to them any special counteraction to their connate corruption, or any opportunity of certainly learning how they might choose the good and refuse the evil. Now all such results as these, however logically deduced from their literal premises, are obviously inconsistent with the character of GOD and that outline of His moral government which we have given us in and through CHRIST—and must be so felt to be if we read only the New Testament of our Lord

and Saviour. The making of the sun to shine and the rain to fall upon the evil and the good alike—the filling all hearts with measures of gladness—the declaring that of such as children are the members of the kingdom of heaven —these things, and many more such as these, do not testify of such a creed: nor JESUS at Bethlehem, nor JESUS in the garden, nor JESUS on the Cross.

Such special contradictions as these between Theological dogmas and the characteristic spirit of the Gospel, would alone teach us the wisdom, if not the necessity, of a reconsideration of our theoretic creed from time to time, and are the highest proofs we can have of its imperfection. But there are other more general considerations which enforce this suggestion. For we must remember that however unchangeable Truth may be (and there may be more significance in this oft-repeated assertion than is at first sight visible, or than is verbally demonstrable) the mind of man is very far from unchangeable. The mind of the race would seem subjected by the Creator to a law of gradual development: a law which, it may be, we cannot at present precisely define, but one the existence of which we are also equally unable to doubt or deny—a law which renders the modes of thought of one age unsuited in many respects to the mental needs of a far-distant one. All the greatest products of human thought we observe to have a history—a history which shows us that they have come to be what they are only through a succession of changes, and which gives us no presumptive evidence that the series of changes is perfected, or nearly so. Language, too, has been everywhere a result of gradual formation, only after long and manifold mutations perfecting itself, and while doing so incorporating

into its very substance diverse modes of thought concerning the same subjects: and Philosophies of all kinds—besides being so much dependent upon language—have had, and have now, within themselves principles of self-destruction (and it may be of reconstruction) defining the essentially indefinite, and using as means towards ulterior results elements in themselves wholly indeterminate. And even Morality itself has been by no means always absolute or inflexible, nor even stationary. And Theology is dependent on all these. Indeed it may be said quite generally of all moral truth, that in order for it to be influential on human character, either in the case of individuals or communities, it must receive a form and a colour from the minds of its recipients. We cannot pour such truth into the mind either of an individual or of a multitude as we pour fluid into a vessel of the potter, and preserve it there, or withdraw it again, exactly as it was originally. It only becomes influential by being consciously and actively apprehended and appropriated by every faculty of the spiritual man. It must be assimilated as well as imbibed, before it will permeate and heal and invigorate his whole spiritual nature. And thus all moral Truth becomes subjective, and Theology progressive.

VII.

Biblical Theology, its relation to criticism and history.

In consequence of this variable and subjective character of Biblical Theology, when it prevails over large regions of time and space, it would seem almost necessary that at certain periods it should undergo deliberate revision, and that at all times it should be submitted to the criticism of

the human mind, and to the most careful comparison with its sources, that it may not get overwhelmed by human traditions—which may be but corruptions. The fact of the truths of Revelation having been communicated to us chiefly through the medium of ancient records—written in languages no longer spoken on the earth, and in a form wholly unsystematic—a fact which meets us often under different points of view, and always with some large significance—this at once authorises and obliges us to have recourse to such repeated examination. The scholarship, too, which enables us to interpret the sources of Biblical Theology is not a fixed and unalterable instrument of knowledge: but on the contrary, one which is constantly varying, and on the whole, it may be hoped, as constantly improving. The decisions, therefore, which it pronounced centuries ago as to the meaning of certain portions of Scripture may be reversed to-day, and consequently large deductions which may have been drawn from its ancient interpretations and incorporated into our Theology may now be worthless, and ought therefore to be removed: while other portions of Scripture which in past ages may have been to us as blanks, may have since become decipherable with as much certainty as any other, and ought therefore to be embodied in that form of belief which is submitted to our times as Biblical Theology.

And not only this: but also the connection of our written sources of Theology with the history of man otherwise to be learnt, urges this consideration upon us with still greater force. Our knowledge of the past and present condition of the race of which we are members is continually growing, and of late has been rapidly enlarging: and in its spreading

it comes more and more into contact with the notices of history which are mixed up in the unsystematic records which contain our religious Revelations, and into collision with many of the received interpretations of those records. The larger a person's region of scholarship, the more will he know that these things may be so : but even those of less extended knowledge may know, that every fresh research into the earliest records of mankind is reopening for us the question of the antiquity of our race ; and the tendency of all such investigation at present seems to indicate, that before that question is closed some considerable alteration may be required in our received opinions : for we find not only positive historic evidence tending to prove a greater antiquity than we have hitherto admitted, but that precisely in proportion as we are compelled to recognise on other grounds the unity of our race, we are also compelled to extend our notions of its antiquity.

The discrepancies, however, between Divine Revelation and human knowledge which relate merely to matters of scholarship and the history of man, are at present not so great but that they may admit of a variety of methods of reconciliation, and even may be altogether removed by further progress in those researches which have occasioned them. The assurance to be attained by mere scholarship is never of the highest kind, and our knowledge of the history of our race is really very small at present, compared with the large regions of it which remain unknown. Were the difficulties arising from these quarters, then, all or nearly all, our Biblical Theology, so far as they are concerned, might possibly stand unshaken for a long while yet. But these are not all : there are discrepancies of another

kind which are far more considerable—discrepancies not merely between Scholarship and Theology, but between Science and Theology. When discrepancies become scientific, that is, demonstrable, the difficulty of the case becomes more considerable: for no certainty can be greater than that which attaches to some sciences—as that of Astronomy, for instance: and here wherever there is conflict it is one of authority, and not merely of interpretation. The alterations, which have taken place in our conceptions of the material Universe during the last three centuries—alterations which cannot but be held to be for the most part as true as if they were parts of a written Revelation—are critical instances of the influence which Natural Philosophy has a right to exercise over Scholastic Theology. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the very position of our earth in the universe was changed in the minds of all thoughtful persons, and the heavens in one grand sense made almost new, it will never be forgotten that the Church then contradicted with anathema that which has since been proved true to its own conviction: and this ought to be for all a standing lesson that in all similar cases of new scientific assertions, the voice of the Theologian ought to be listened to most respectfully when it speaks least loudly. Such caution may not be long unnecessary: and there is one notable conclusion of modern thought—due to a study which holds a place intermediate between those conversant with the interpretation of ancient records and those admitting the strictest demonstrations—which must now greatly modify traditional Theology, namely this, that animal death certainly existed before the creation of man, and that the same evidences of imperfection and disorganisa-

tion which we trace in Nature now, we can also trace there in ages long before the date of any human sin.

Whatever may be the real significance of such facts as these—and that significance will be variously estimated according to the amount of reverence it is supposed necessary to attach to traditional interpretations of Scripture—yet we cannot but feel—adjust and readjust as we may our interpretations of the Scriptural representation of the universe and of the world, according as our extending knowledge of both is continually obliging us to do—that any true or adequate perception of the great scheme of life of which they formed a part was not present to the writers of either the Hebrew or the Christian Scriptures. Clearly from the first we see that in some respects the Bible is very limited as a Revelation—not extending itself to many departments of modern science and discovery. The cosmogony and geography and ethnography, the physiology and astronomy of Genesis, for instance, cannot obviously be the way in which the heavens and the earth present themselves ever to Him who created them: and no adequate conception of the extent and capabilities of the earth and its inhabitants seems ever to have been vouchsafed to even the chief of the Apostles. Indeed it is admitted very generally now, though after much reluctance, that the departments of human knowledge which can be framed into sciences may, and must, be withdrawn from our conceptions of those provinces over which the Revelations of the Scriptures extend. But if so, is it certain that only these may be, and must be? What Scriptural sanction have we for a line so drawn? If so much of natural science may, without any sanction or even notice on the part of the Scriptures

themselves, be reasonably and justly withdrawn, may not something of moral science also? Does not the moral world, as well as the material, teach us some truths by which we are to judge, and if necessary to limit the Revelations of Scripture? In Scripture itself we are presumed to have a moral knowledge antecedent to, and therefore independent of, its own special written communications: and this being so, must not such moral knowledge hold to the Scriptures, or to Biblical Theology at the least, the same relation in moral matters that our independent physical science does in its region? And if this be true, it will be found that such an admission will ultimately require from us a re-adjustment of our traditional opinions concerning the design and method of Revelation, and a more comprehensive and harmonious conception of the relations of science and of Scripture than that which is the mere consequence of the successive involuntary concessions of the one to the other.

And let not this be a stumbling-block to us: but let us rather bethink ourselves that we shall err equally if we do not know, and knowing revere, the power of GOD as well as the Scriptures. The laws of Nature, what are they but expressions of the will and mind of GOD? The forms of Geometry, the laws of Astronomy, are modes of the Divine thought, and therefore as an expression of these, science as well as Scripture is, or may be, a sacred study. Surely there is something indefinitely noble—solemnly sublime—in any studies which like these are conversant continually with forms of time and space which are integral portions of the ground-plan of GOD's universe—governing throughout innumerable worlds, and existing throughout all ages sure and incorruptible. The knowledge of the universe thus

regarded is indeed a rightful portion of Theology, and the man of science may thus always be in some sense as a priest and a prophet of Nature, and of Nature's GOD.

But if such considerations should still be considered inadequate, let us again bethink ourselves whether anything more is indisputably necessary for the satisfaction of any of our real needs than that we should possess a Revelation which should concern itself exclusively with our moral life—which should contain larger provisions than we now can use for the promotion of our spiritual progress, and promises of future light and hope according to our need indefinitely. If this would be confessedly sufficient, such a Revelation certainly we have.

And above all let it be distinctly understood, and constantly borne in mind, that Religion and Theology are widely different from each other, and that it is most injurious to the one to identify its interests with those of the other. The foundation of the one lies in the moral portion of our nature, that of the other in the intellectual. Religion is a spirit—Theology only a creed. Religion is nourished on ideas and intuitions—the offspring of the reason and the conscience, and the gift of special Revelation; Theology is for the most part constituted of deductions made by the understanding from its conceptions of these ideas. But such conceptions and deductions are in many cases demonstrably false, and in all probably imperfect (for the ideas of Religion are essentially incommensurate with the forms of the understanding): and therefore all Theologies hitherto have been infirm and unstable—not only admitting but demanding continual modifications and adaptations to the fluctuations of human discernment and culture. In fact

a large portion of every Theology hitherto promulgated has involved in it a dependence on most complicated, and often mutually repellant, principles of Philosophy: while more may rest upon its present apparently stable base simply because nothing hitherto has been discovered to disturb or disprove it. But all essential Religion rests on the intuitions of reason, or the suggestions of conscience, or the facts of Revelation, which no science and no discovery can either prove or disprove. All true Religion centres in the contemplation of the idea of one Supreme Moral and Personal GOD: The Christian Religion all centres in the contemplation of CHRIST—the true image of that GOD, and the one adequate exponent of His Will and purposes towards man.

VIII.

Systematic Theology at best provisional, not perfect.

Under these circumstances these pages would suggest, and even earnestly exhort, that all Systematic Theology should be considered as of very subordinate obligation, and that it should be regarded rather as a provisional, though it may be progressive, arrangement of Revelations, than as a necessary portion of Christian faith. It is here admitted that such provisional hypotheses—such tentative arguments—may have been, and may be, highly advantageous in many ways to the education of Christian men; but it is equally asserted that they have also been in many ways injurious, by being unduly magnified in importance, and that it is highly expedient that they should now be reduced to their really subordinate position in the great series of means by which the natural man may be transformed into

the spiritual. It is not denied, however, that there are objective truths which have a real existence, and it may be an unchangeable form, independently of our minds : but it is asserted that these truths in relation to our minds can often only be apprehended by us under forms varied according to our minds' conditions, and that we can never attain to any evidence respecting such truths which is not ultimately largely subjective. In fact, if truth logically considered is one, truth morally considered is manifold. But whether this be assented to or not, it is an obvious fact, that all Theologies hitherto have been coloured by the minds that have framed them, and have been dependent upon the Philosophies of their age; and therefore now that the more modern mind of Christendom has so greatly changed from that which was so characteristic of its earlier periods, and that much of the Philosophies of old time has become untenable by those of our time, large portions of the Theologies of past ages are naturally and necessarily involved in this change and decay : and thus just in proportion as these Theologies are pronounced of importance to Christian faith, is that faith shaken and impaired.

Wherefore it is here wished to declare that Revelation is not committed to any Theory, nor Religion to any Theology : that the Bible is essentially independent of systems of Philosophy : neither assuming to constitute a system of its own, nor submitting to be defined by any system of man. Let it be well considered if it be not true that Revelation is essentially transcendental : making known to us facts and truths which no human Philosophy of mind or matter could have discovered, or can now demonstrate : and that whenever it does touch upon

ground which is within any of the legitimate provinces of Philosophy, its language is professedly not philosophical. Revelation has never professed to teach even physical or metaphysical laws, but has uniformly manifested its whole essence and aim to be moral, lying in that region of human nature which is characterised by the control of the conscience, and the activity of the will—by all spiritual instincts and affections, and aspirations—and by the illimitable energies of reverence and of faith, of wonder and of love.

The truths peculiar to the Bible have chiefly to do with the infinite and the unseen—the indefinite and the immeasurable—which are precisely those things which are incapable of being dealt with scientifically. All science, truly so called, requires definitions and fixed measures of time and space—constants of some kind. The Revelations of the Bible do not furnish us with such. They present us only with parts of the plan of Providence in the government of man—with no part even complete in itself, much less as to its relations to all others—but rather with discontinuous, though doubtlessly connected, points of light—as the stars are—sufficient for our guidance, and more than sufficient for our wonder, but not sufficient for our theoretic comprehension;—a fragment as of a celestial map rather than any terrestrial chart. In fact the Bible is an inculcation of duties much more than it is a demonstration of propositions, and a declaration of spiritual obligations rather than of intellectual credenda. Its Revelations do not consist by any means exclusively of hidden doctrines, but very characteristically of Divine agencies for quickening and unfolding the spiritual nature of man—of

which, however, truths of various kinds are, no doubt, very important elements.

The Bible is principally a gradually progressive manifestation of the true idea of GOD—of certain relations between our spirits and His, and of a means of Atonement between the two. Its characteristic declarations are the promises of an invisible Person which can become influential on us only through being believed: the prescriptions of a supernatural Wisdom which can become beneficial to us only through being obeyed. They can neither be proved nor disproved by any mere processes of the understanding. The idea of GOD—He that is, and was, and will be—the self-subsisting, all-creating One—how deal with this scientifically? It appeals to the highest reason alone, and therein finds an authentication which any assertions of the lower faculties may contradict, but contradict in vain. The idea of Immortality, who can prove, or disprove, this by any processes of logic? It rests on the testimony of the aspirations of the individual heart sanctioned by the concurrent sympathies of the most noble of our race, and brought to light especially by Him who named Himself the Resurrection and the Life: and the most remorseless deductions of the understanding from the analogies of Nature altogether fail to extinguish it. The idea of Atonement between the Holy and the unholy—between the Creator and the creature—between GOD and man—by the mediation of a Being akin to both—this is a mode of thought and of being which no intellect of man is able at all conclusively to deal with. And the inhabitation of separate souls by the Divine Spirit in such a way as that they shall be partakers of a life and a nourishment super-

natural: and the special yet universal Providence of GOD over the race as well as over the individual—moulding into its own shape all human history without sensibly controlling human will—these are sublime ideas, but they are not demonstrable truths.

And these ideas—and such as these—with their historical realisations, are those which are, and which alone are, of the essence of Revelation. And these no discoveries of science, whether material or moral, can ever avail to abolish, for they belong to a region of our nature, which is wholly irreducible to any laws which the mere logical faculty can appreciate or define. Whatever else there is in the Bible—whatever does not professedly relate to the moral nature of GOD and man—whatever cannot reasonably be referred to the spiritual needs, or probable edification of humanity—is of only subordinate importance, and may in many cases be permitted to share the imperfections which necessarily accompany either the instrument or the recipient of the essential Revelation. And if this should be admitted and borne in mind, any speculations of the intellect, or any processes of reasoning, might be regarded with any degree of interest, and without the least degree of alarm. For if they be unjust or untrue they can be proved to be so, and after such proof it will be simply impossible for any one to believe them: and if they be otherwise, they can but touch the body of Revelation, they cannot touch its soul: and most probably they will never do more than unclothe it of one dress to clothe it in another.

IX.

Systematic Theology unknown to the Jews.

That there is nothing antecedently improbable or unreasonable in this view of the subordinate importance or authority of Theology, is confirmed to us by the consideration that Judaism was not theoretic. The Jews in the times of the Old Testament knew nothing of Systematic Theology. The great Revelations of Moses were Commandments of duty rather than Articles of belief. True indeed it was, that underlying and embodied in these commandments there was a declaration of the Name of GOD; but that Name was not a metaphysical but a moral and historical definition. The whole Pentateuch contains no doctrine (save what is involved in this Name of GOD) expressed otherwise than symbolically. The Jews had no other Catechism, or Creed, or Articles of Faith, but their Ritual. Their Religion addressed itself not to the intellect principally or largely, but almost exclusively to the will; it required the sacrifice of obedience and not the exercise of the mind. Indeed it would be well for our better understanding of many things, if we carefully considered how few articles of belief were authoritatively required at any time from a Jew, and how small were the additions to them made in the thousand years from Moses to Malachi, by any direct Revelations from on high. Until the carrying away into Babylon it would seem that the Divine communications were certainly oftenest the mere quickening into clearer consciousness, and the rousing into more energetic action, some truth already revealed or acknowledged, rather than the revelation of any fresh measures of objective truth. And

even during their residence there and afterwards, the utterances of the Prophets were scarcely in any strict sense Revelations: they were rather exhortations to the performance of admitted duties by the promise of the Divine blessing, than any express enunciations of otherwise undiscoverable truths.

The whole structure, indeed, of the Jewish economy, as well as the whole culture of the Jewish mind, was averse to all speculative or scientific tendencies. Indeed it was based on a principle which precluded all such tendencies. The Jews' fundamental belief was that GOD regulated the affairs of their world—and with anything beyond this they were not interested, their destiny being one of Divine seclusion —not by general, but by special, laws—a belief superseding and disconcerting all speculation. And they received the knowledge of those special laws wholly through traditionary or contemporary revelation: and therefore they had no occasion for, and no call to, anything respecting these but to obey them. Thus they never sought truth, they simply received it. They always felt it to be of the essence of that special covenant into which GOD had entered with their fathers, that on their part should be only obedience, on His all necessary guidance; and that as the Almighty One had thus undertaken to reveal His will so specially to them, He would require from them a knowledge of only what He had seen it good thus to reveal.

And when we pass out of the period of special Revelation into that singular period of four centuries and more which lies between the close of the Old Testament and the commencement of the New, the precedent of Jewish history would seem to suggest to us that our Theology—our

speculative and systematic knowledge of the relations between GOD and man—may become more and more adequate in each successive age by those indefinite and incalculable influences of general human culture which so many now are so ready to depreciate or to decry. The Jewish mind had much enlarged between the times of Malachi and Matthew without any succession of prophets especially sent of GOD, or any indisputable revelations of any kind. Their extended intercourse with the world had brought them within the influence of much reflected light, which considerably modified their belief respecting the unseen world and their own individual destiny, and indeed had given birth to so many new thoughts and habits, that the condition of things which we meet with in the New Testament presents itself to us as so peculiar that it obliges us to a new and special study for its due understanding and interpretation.

X.

No Systematic Theology in the New Testament Scriptures.

Equally in the New Testament we find no complete theory of the human and Divine—nothing which may at all correspond to the notion of a Scientific Theology. We do find what may justly be termed doctrines—indeed these are a very distinguishing element in New Testament teaching: but we do not find any series of Articles of belief, or any Divinely constructed symbolical Creed. The New Testament is very principally, though not exclusively, the exhibition of new relations between GOD and man through a Mediator, and the offer of a new spirit by which these relations may be personally realised. Christianity does not make itself responsible for any Metaphysics: and it is inde-

pendent of all systems of Philosophy. It does not anywhere assume to furnish solutions of intellectual difficulties, but only remedies for spiritual evils, and supplies for moral needs. Its aim and its means are the cultivation of the conscience and the satisfaction of the affections by the presentation of objects of faith which shall be at once models of duty and subjects of sympathy. It doubtless must be considered as both contemplating and effecting much more than this; but yet the indulgence or the strengthening of the understanding by the bestowment of new instruments or data for its exercise, must under any view ever be regarded as among its indirect and subordinate effects, rather than as among its primary and peculiar purposes.

There are no metaphysical discussions concerning Deity in the New Testament, and scarcely any morally philosophical ones concerning duty. Whatever difficulties are solved for us in it are generally of a practical kind, and these by example rather than by demonstration—as for instance, the great difficulty of the significance of prayer. It assumes CHRIST Himself to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and thus it makes Himself His Gospel, and rests everything on the Word of Him whom it represents as the Word of GOD. This is a peculiarity which should especially be noted. The New Testament never proclaims the Lord JESUS as principally a Teacher or a Prophet, but as far more than both of these—as the Image of GOD and the Saviour of man. He speaks of Himself, too, never as the founder of a school, but as the founder of a society. He preached mainly the coming of a new era—the introduction of a new dispensation—the mission of a new spirit—on the earth: but the proclamation of this even was not the

chief aim of his life. He was not so much the Teacher as the Truth : He rather lived His Doctrine than preached it ; His Life and Death, in fact, were the foundation of His Religion—themselves the rudiments of a new faith—new data for new duties. Thus He rather disciplined Disciples who should be the teachers of the world, than was the world's teacher Himself, and infused into them the power to understand a Religion which could be fully comprehended and expounded only after His own death and Resurrection, and fully received only when completed by the dispensation of that Spirit which proceeded from the Father and Himself.

But if we examine such records as we have of His most expressly didactic discourses, we shall be still more impressed with the unsystematic nature of His teaching. We have many of these discourses handed down to us three or four times over, but not once with any order which even the most laborious criticism can surely harmonise. His Sermon on the Mount (as it is called), could anything be more unsystematic than that? His copious use of parables and of proverbs, was not that popular rather than scientific? And in every utterance of His, do we not see that almost all has direct reference to the state of the heart and life of those to whom He speaks, and scarcely anything is said with reference merely to the exercise and development of the understanding? Does He not speak most of love to GOD and man—of goodness and of wisdom and of duty, more than of doctrine or of knowledge : prescribing discipline to the moral nature by commanding the cultivation of the heart's best affections and holiest aspirations, rather than initiating the intellect into the mysteries of invisible

relationships? To love those who do not love us as He loved those who did not love Him; to labour and pray for men under the feeling that the less they deserve the more they need: to deny ourselves for our brethren's sake, and to be as He was in this world—these, and such as these, were His precepts. That a man must be born again of the Spirit before he can enter the kingdom of Heaven: that a man may look up to Heaven with confidence proportioned to the humility with which he looks upon himself; that a man must be penitent and prayerful and faithful if he would be a true child of GOD: and that since He had come into the world to give His life for it and to take away its sin, no man could come unto the Father henceforth but by Him, but that through Him all might come, and coming would never be cast out—these, and such as these, were His doctrines. But in such precepts and such doctrines there is nothing which admits of being reduced into a system, or the spirit of which would not be injured by being compressed into a creed. In fact the teaching of JESUS was not only not systematic, but it was scarcely as much constructive as it was the contrary. It freed truth from its bondage to old forms more than imposed on it new ones. It was most of all the revelation and introduction of a new spirit and a new ideal: the exhibition of a diviner mind and life than was ever before manifested on earth: the infusion, as it were, into humanity of a new power which throughout all ages might be able to vivify all possible forms of its development, and constitute a great realm of regenerated spirit in which there might be a harmonious union of manifoldly diversified gifts, and a consentient combination of very varied operations.

Unquestionably, however, Apostolic teaching does in a very considerable degree differ from that which we have just been considering. It was more doctrinal, and dwelt in greater detail upon the connection of the Divine counsels, and the coherency of that great plan which had progressively been proclaimed from the earliest time, and now was consummated in CHRIST. But though the teaching of Apostles is often so doctrinal, it is seldom, in a theological sense, systematic. It does not present doctrines in a continuous logical and universal form, as a series of obligatory credenda, but always as special adaptions to the modes of thought of those to whom they write or speak. The most systematic portions of Apostolic writings are those which are addressed to Jews, and have for their special purpose the showing of the connection between the Jewish and Christian dispensations, and the general connection of Christianity with Judaism, as part of one predetermined and harmonious plan: but whenever they are the most catholic they are the least systematic, and never undertake to connect Christianity with any philosophy of man: but rather repeatedly denounce all such attempts, and even repudiate all such connection.

And therefore if what has been said with regard to the unsystematic nature of all the other parts of the Bible be true, whereinsoever some of the apostolic teaching may thus differ from all the rest, it may be but an instance of that very flexibility and liberty of adaptation which has been declared to be very characteristic of Divine instructions. Unquestionably those portions of apostolic teaching which are the most systematic are also the most Judaic—or at least are the most accommodated to Jewish modes of

thought. And such modes of thought are essentially limited and temporary, and become less and less fitted for universal adoption the more the Christian Church comprehends larger and wider regions of the world. Occasionally indeed it may be not only advisable but necessary for those of all ages to view Christianity from a Judaic standing point, and under the relations in which it stands to special Jewish ordinances and provisions; we should never indeed get a thorough view of it unless we sometimes submitted ourselves to Hebrew influences, because there were certain elements of the Judaic dispensation which were specially given in order that they might reveal some portions of Christianity to minds of all ages which are in certain stages of their growth. But if we ought thus to dwell at certain seasons, and for certain special ends, on Jewish ground, we ought also very distinctly to bear in mind that anywhere thereon there can be no permanent and final position for the mature Christian. For those who are privileged as we are, the highest culture of the maturest Jew will not suffice, and inheritors as we are of eighteen centuries of Christian grace, it can be but retrogression for us to do more than halt or sojourn on any Judaic resting-place. Apostolic teaching itself shows us this: for while there are in it ample adaptations to contemporary modes of thought, there is also much more that is purely Catholic, and even under all the temporary accommodations there is a spirit latent—and it breaks out here and there—which at once reduces all such accommodations to their true significance, and reveals a region around them which by its vastness and its grandeur makes us feel that they are indeed most limited. Verily apostolic teaching has not committed itself to any inflexible

formulæ of expression: but as in its first communications it used a diversity of tongues to accommodate itself to the wants of its immediate authors, so in its permanent records it has embodied differences of expression which will be found to be equally adapted to the varying needs of each age of the Church as they arise.

XI.

Objections to these assertions: faith opposed to reason.

But to all considerations of the kind hitherto advanced —which tend to give to man so much liberty of judgment upon the records which contain the special Revelation of GOD, and which express a dissatisfaction with all unrevealed, or only inferential, Theology—there will ever promptly arise the objection on the part of many, that it is irreverent to set up the feeble and fallible mind of man as the judge of the omniscient purpose of GOD; and that considering the immensity of the interests attached to the subjects of Biblical Revelations, to do this must be little less than profanity: and that if the principle were admitted of not receiving anything but what could be reconciled with man's previous conceptions, or accounted for by his logical faculties, it would issue in practically rejecting some of the greatest doctrines of our faith, and would exclude all mysteries from our Religion. Now as such objections are in some respects of considerable force, and the true answers to them will help to the better understanding of more points than those which seem immediately concerned, it shall now be stated how far they are here admitted, and how far they are considered untenable. Such objections are of extensive application, but perhaps they may almost all be included in two

cases—that wherein faith is opposed to reason, and that wherein faith is opposed to conscience.

Most true then is it that nothing can well be more irrational and irreverent than to reject asserted Revelations of GOD simply because we cannot understand how these things can be. No folly and no sin can well be greater than to refuse to listen to teachings which profess to come from GOD, merely on the ground that we cannot prove that what is said is true by the processes of our logic, if only it be supported by the sympathies of our spiritual nature, and not contradicted by the intuitions of our reason. This has already been abundantly admitted in these pages—for it has been said that all the peculiar truths of Religion are assertions which, however they may be apprehended by the reason, cannot be comprehended by the understanding of man. Religion has its mysteries—indeed is founded upon truths which are at once reasonable objects of faith and impossible objects of knowledge: and Revelation does not undertake to remove these mysteries, but rather deepens our sense of them, and introduces some peculiar to itself which it does not profess theoretically to solve. Indeed that which develops, or attempts to do so, the ideas of GOD and of Man, and the relations between the two, according to a certain natural or necessary order of the thoughts alone—this is not Religion but Theology.

With regard, then, to those religious ideas which transcend the spheres of time and space, and are inextricably blended with the most inexplicable of all finite forces—the will of man—that portion of man's faculties—his understanding—which is conversant only with what can be conceived of under the forms of time and space, and with the

antecedents and consequents of measurable phenomena, can have neither evidence nor objection to offer. It is only when such ideas are asserted to have manifested themselves in the world of sense by definite effects, or when particular series of visible means are specified as instruments and modes of Divine communications, that they are legitimately brought within the province of the mere understanding of man, and can consequently be justly subjected to his merely logical criticism. But when this is the case, then it is here maintained, that the understanding is not only permitted, but is specially called upon, to investigate and to judge. God indeed may, and every Christian believes that He often does, reveal Himself as a Spirit to spirit, and such Revelations are only spiritually to be discerned and interpreted: but wherever He is asserted to do otherwise, it is no irreverence, but the very reverse, to scrutinise strictly the professed signs and instruments of such Revelations: and the more strictly just, in proportion as the asserted Revelation receives more opposition from the intellectual perceptions and convictions of our nature, and less confirmation from its spiritual instincts and intuitions.

All claims made for things in some respects obviously and certainly human to be also Divine, are of a most lofty and most solemnly important character, and such as the history of the world has proved to be only exceptionally just: and therefore it is but due reverence to Deity carefully and sedulously to investigate them, lest we should give to another that which is due to Him alone. For really to find the Divine manifesting itself purely in the human, and the invisible becoming visible, is among the rarest of events; and the ready reverence of the seen as a symbol or

substitute of the unseen, is the source and essence of all idolatry. Whenever, therefore, any Revelation is asserted to be made by means of any outward facts or events which are objects of our own consciousness or observation—or which rest for their credibility on human testimony humanly recorded as to their having been objects of the experience of others—or indeed are declared to be made in language and by agents differing but little externally from that which is of the ordinary human type—this not only may, but ought to be examined with all possible severity of the understanding. There is no other way conceivable by which we can become intelligent believers, or prevent ourselves from becoming credulous idolators. And further, if any portion of such asserted Revelation contradicts the conclusions of the understanding while at the same time it finds no support in the regions of the reason or the conscience, it ought to be rejected with firmness and without fear. For whatever assumes to be superhuman and yet cannot make good its claims in any one province of human nature, cannot be entitled to that act of religious faith which is the very highest product of all combined.

Perhaps indeed, much as the contradictions between faith and reason are spoken of, we can scarcely abstractedly conceive of such a case as that anything which is not in accordance with the reason of man should be required of him as a matter of faith: and certainly in the Bible we are spared any evil results of such an opposition between faith and reason, and even between our belief and our understanding, if we adopt the principles of these pages. For though there do unquestionably exist small errors and seeming contradictions in various parts of the numerous

documents of which the Bible is composed, yet the evidence that any specially Divine authority extends to these is so slight, or rather the probability that it does not is so strong, that the resistance offered to our understanding by our faith is of quite tolerable, and even inconsiderable amount. And though it is true enough that there is much in the Bible which we not only cannot demonstrate to be in accordance with the necessary results of any reasoning of ours, but which also seems to us inexplicable, yet here we have the consciousness of our ignorance to mitigate our dogmatism, and the reasonable suggestion that the whole case is not before us, and that if it were, it might be altogether too complex for our comprehension.

One class of doctrines, however, there is which lies between the regions of our reason and our conscience, or it may be spreads over both—such as those of the Trinity and the Incarnation—which do offer to us very mingled difficulties. And did they stand alone—unconnected with our moral being and unsupported by the rest of the Revelation of which they are asserted to form a part—they might perhaps be set aside as without the region of our profitable or even reasonable contemplation. But they do not thus stand alone; on the contrary they are bound up most intimately with the whole of that peculiar representation of GOD, and of man's relation to Him, which is the special subject of all our written Revelation. They are not indeed stated theologically—and the recognition and remembrance of this fact might do much to obviate much opposition—but they are inwoven in the whole scheme which is exhibited to us in the Bible as Divinely devised for the restoration of man, and they are applied in Scrip-

ture in manifold ways to guide the thoughts, and influence the motives, and elevate the affections of the subjects of that grand plan: they are upheld everywhere in the latest Revelations as views which most of all conduce to our due conception of the incomprehensible wisdom and love of the Divine Nature; and while they impress upon man most forcibly the conviction of his now low and lost estate, magnify for him beyond all that it could ever have entered into his heart to conceive, his latent capacities and the destiny for which he may be reserved. And it is thus in their moral connections that these doctrines assume at once a reasonableness and an importance which as mere abstract propositions they might but doubtfully be entitled to. And after all it should be remembered, that no other exposition of the infinite—no metaphysical representation of Deity—has hitherto been set forth in human language which is not apparently a contradiction to the understanding: that these doctrines are not more than this; and that while they surpass all mental comprehension they do not come into collision with any dictate of the natural conscience, or any irresistible intuition of the highest reason.

XII.

Faith opposed to conscience.

The cases in which faith and conscience are asserted to be opposed deserve equally a careful consideration. With regard to such it has been often said, that because a doctrine of Revelation, or a deduction of Theology, may apparently contradict our convictions of right and wrong, it is not therefore necessarily incredible, for that GOD's ways are not as man's ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts:

and that the government of an infinite Universe may require an administration in some portions of it contradictory to our limited understanding and impaired moral sense, and that especially knowing so little of any such case as we do, it is presumptuous to judge of it as if we knew the whole. Now as such feelings and reasonings have a very wide influence in the formation of opinion in matters of religion, and as they are perpetually recurring in various portions of all systems of Theology, it is here said very emphatically: The reason and the conscience of man are for him the image of GOD, and as such are as sacred as anything can be: that it is therefore not irreverent, but most reverent, to compare with these whatever is asserted to be good or evil: and that if these be duly distinguished from any mere judgments according to sensible evidence and logical sequence on the one hand, and from any mere impression of traditional or conventional morality on the other—there need be no fear of, and there ought to be no limit to, their freest and fullest exercise. Indeed reliance on these—on our powers of judging between right and wrong, good and evil absolutely—upon our perception of an essential and infinite difference between justice and injustice, and approval of the one and disapproval of the other—is the preliminary assumption which renders any Theology, or any morality, or any Religion possible.

There is indeed nothing of which we feel more certain than the reality of our instinct of justice. This is one of the fixed points in our nature which we may and must measure spiritual worth by—a feeling which will be found the most prompt of all the feelings of the child, the most confirmed in the wisest man, and the last to quit the most

depraved: and if ever we abjure this, or are even made to doubt its authority, we can scarcely help making shipwreck of all other facultiesof our moral nature. That man is still so much in the Image of GOD as that his instinctive and ineradicable moral judgments are substantially transcripts of His, and that though GOD is greater than our hearts and knoweth all things, yet that in those things which our hearts do know they anticipate His sentence—this it is absolutely necessary to believe, if we would not cut from under ourselves all the foundations on which any moral judgment whatsoever can be based. The Infinity of GOD'S nature when contrasted never so strongly with the limitedness of man's, cannot really affect the character of our judgments of His dealings in any asserted Revelations of them; for if GOD'S attributes be in any case so appreciable by us as to be distinguishable in kind, then it is no mere extension in degree that can be considered capable of changing an attribute into its contrary. GOD'S justice, for instance, cannot be conceived as transformed into injustice at any point of its infinity, or His truthfulness into unfaithfulness; were it otherwise, we should worship we know not what. And most assuredly we must not allow the introduction of the mere Omnipotence of Deity into any reasoning concerning His asserted moral government, in any way to affect our judgments. For power is not a moral attribute at all—it is little else but another name for force: and if it were conjoined with injustice, the best instincts of our nature would prompt us not to reverence but to resist it. Verily all Morality and Religion is in danger with us if we ever come to recognise justice as the mere creature of power: and if we suppose that the relations of right and

wrong are so different with GOD that what our hearts condemn GOD may approve, all worship of Him in spirit and in truth becomes henceforth impossible. For all such worship must be founded upon a sympathy in the worshipper with the object of his worship. Indeed the Being whom a man can adore—infinitely love as well as infinitely fear—must be to him the representative of what he deems good in its highest form, and of that alone: and his true worship must imply an aversion from any appearance of injustice proportionate to his attraction to all that seems just.

It would indeed be well to consider whether it is not true that the more we expatiate on the corruption of our mental and moral judgments, the more we are, by so doing, disqualifying ourselves on our own showing from pronouncing any opinion worth considering upon any such subject as those with which Theology has especially to deal: and also whether the real corruption of our nature does not lie principally and emphatically in our will, and in our loving darkness and hating light, while we recognise the contrast between the two: in not liking to do, in fact, what we acknowledge to be best, rather than in our inability to determine which is the better when good and evil are laid equally before us. With but little attention we may surely see that this assertion of the imperfection of man's conscience and the infirmity of his reason, to be of any avail in such arguments, must be limited very strictly, or otherwise it will prove destructive of the very purpose for which it is employed. It is almost obviously a double-edged sword which if used at all must be used with the greatest carefulness and skill, lest it should slay what it was meant to defend. For if we cannot judge of what would be

unjust in anything that is asserted to be a part of the Divine Government, we cannot in such case judge of what would be just: and so all that we now suppose to indicate the goodness and wisdom of GOD may, through this lamentable corruption of our conscience and this miserable impotence of our reason, be reduced to a mere delusion of our own presumption. And if mere infinity of degree may reverse qualities in kind, there is no absurdity or immorality which may not be considered as Divine, and all apparent distinction between one attribute and another is practically abolished. And if propositions not merely apparently, but to our best apprehensions demonstrably, contradictory to each other, may yet be supposed to be parts of the same Revelation, what possible limit can there be to the belief of inconsistencies? And if there really be this indistinctness and seeming constant contradiction about the moral aspect of a Revelation, what is it that is revealed? How can we establish an internal evidence for the religion of the Bible, or against any forms of Heathenism? And is not all thought confused, and the very significance of all religious language made void?

XIII.

Necessary assumptions in all theological arguments.

Were these principles fully followed out, and these distinctions carefully borne in mind, they might reconcile us to, if they did not wholly explain for us, some of the mysteries and perplexities which we meet with in Biblical Revelations, and might enable us to appreciate, and sympathising to remove, some of the difficulties which are felt so frequently by thoughtful minds as to the reception of the

external evidences of Christianity. But of the large subjects herein involved, and to which such considerations might be applied, little indeed can here be said: but these following indications ought not at least to be overlooked.

In all Theological arguments and speculations we must take these as ultimate facts:

That the Universe is finite and man dependent, and both rendered so by an Infinite and Independent Will, whose nature the understanding cannot so comprehend as to define, but whose existence the reason and conscience may so apprehend as to adore: That the Supreme Creator has not only so separated Himself from His creation as to make it objective to Himself, but has also constituted man with a will equally separate from His own: That the creation of GOD is constituted of degrees, with a possibility of deterioration and a capability of improvement, certain but indefinite: And that in the Universe and in man there are really existent good and evil, with essential opposition between the two.

These assertions so underlie all reasonings on moral subjects, and are at the same time so wholly irreducible to any forms which the understanding and its instruments can deal with, that whatever difficulty in the assertions of Revelation can be shown to be directly resolvable into these facts, must be considered as having received all the solution of which it is capable, and may not be rejected on the ground of incomprehensibility alone.

And then further it should be noted, that those large questions which lie at the foundation of all Theologies—the questions of GOD'S foreknowledge and man's freewill, of predestination and necessity, and the like—are really ques-

tions of Philosophy rather than of Religion: or at least that they are not in any way characteristic of the Revelations of the Bible. They are recognised there, as they must be almost necessarily, but scarcely more than recognised. They are not argued of, much less are they professedly resolved. It should certainly be borne in mind that such questions are debated with far more keenness in other Religions than they are in that of the Bible: indeed they are characteristic of all the most highly developed Religions except that which has been revealed in the Bible: they are discussed at this day the most earnestly by Brahmins and Mohammedans. And thus in accordance with these facts we find most mention of such subjects in those parts of the Old Testament which bear upon them the faintest impress of Revelation, and the least in those which are most evidently Divine: they are conspicuous in Job and Ecclesiastes, they are dim indeed in the discourses of JESUS and the Epistles of St. John. The only additional help, in fact, which the Bible affords us in these matters is a contribution towards their practical and personal, and not towards their theoretic, solution: and this is from that great depository of grace from out of which so many other needs of man are supplied, and so many other of his burdens are lightened, namely, the gradual substitution of the parental idea of GOD for that of all others. Philosophically considered even, these questions will probably become henceforth less and less earnestly debated, as on any systems hitherto promulgated they have been sufficiently demonstrated to be hopelessly insoluble; and perchance other systems are coming into view under which they will scarcely be intelligible as questions, much less attempted to be solved as problems.

And surely considered under the light of the latest Revelations, men will grow more and more averse to the entertainment of questions which proceed on the idea of GOD as absolute Will, rather than as impartial and infinite Love, and will deem all such discussions as a stepping backwards across the border line of Christianity into the very midst of Judaism—yea, even a returning from the promised land into Egypt, or at least into the wilderness.

Even the mystery of the existence of evil would cease to be oppressive if Theology did not proceed on an assumption of its perpetuity. Admit but the possibility of the ultimate disappearance of evil, and the burden of the mystery of its present existence becomes from that moment not intolerable. The crushing weight of an infinite pressure is lightened : respiration of the soul becomes possible through an opening into the infinite, and bright cloud at least is visible beyond. That anything, or many things, can be working together now for final evil, and that nothing ever can or will cause the Universe to become again like its Author All-good, this is the disturbing, distressing thought or theory, which in proportion as it is received outweighs all accumulations of evidences from all the regions of Physical or Metaphysical Theology. The obvious and sufficient reason why we may not judge unfavourably of the wisdom and the goodness of the Supreme Will from the numerous instances which we have of incomprehensible evil and misery which exist in the world, is this, that we are not in possession of the whole case, and especially not of its end, and that the allotments of a future state may not only rectify those of the present, but may absolutely require the present condition of things as discipline or development,

or otherwise: the disorganisation and imperfection of the unmoral part of the universe may form some introduction to a nobler state which the unknown future may disclose, and all the sorrow and the suffering of spiritual natures may be as necessary for their immortal education, as exercise and effort are for their mortal growth. In fact the consciousness of our immense ignorance makes us feel that many of the apparent deviations from the law of happiness which we observe may yet not be ultimately deviations from the law of goodness: and while this ignorance lasts they are difficulties only, and not contradictions, because they are presumed to be exceptions. But the moment they are asserted to be law, all argument from our ignorance is precluded, and they have quite another significance. So long as we do not see the end, all seeming evil may be really working together for final good: but as soon as we are supposed to see the end, though it may not be the whole, of the case, and all change in kind is precluded, there is no such solution possible, and we are thrown back upon our first feelings and strongest instincts, with but little help from either reason or faith to modify or correct them. In fact any mystery, or even any evil, may be borne, if we may be permitted to believe that it will cease at some point of the future: but the moment we assume that the least evil is eternal, we darken our whole view of GOD'S character and government indefinitely.

But is it anywhere made obligatory upon us to believe that evil must be without end? It is on all hands admitted that it is wicked to believe that evil is as eternal as good in the past: is it necessary to piety to believe that it must be as eternal as GOD in the future?

XIV.

Theology in relation to special dogmas: Election.

There are some questions, however, which do seem introduced into Theology by Revelation, and which have contributed so largely to the amount of theological speculations, that it would seem necessary here to point out certain peculiarities connected with them. There is the question of Election, technically so called, for instance: a question which has become complicated and magnified in the discussions of Theology beyond anything that possibly could have been intended in the Revelations of the Bible. Our modern metaphysical notion of election, and mode of reasoning concerning it, is a mode of thought which must have been quite unknown and unintelligible to those for whose learning anything was primarily written in the Bible concerning it, and we do but deceive ourselves if we transfer the modes of thought characteristic of one age to the interpretation of the verbal records of other ages far removed from it. The modern Theological notion of election is, that it is unconditional, irreversible, individual, and unto eternal life: the ancient Scriptural notion of election is, that it is conditional, undeserved, national, and unto especial privilege. We first meet with election in the Bible only with the introduction of the Jewish Dispensation —considering Abraham always as the first father and founder of the Jewish people. We never read of it during the purely patriarchal times, though we have individual saints frequently brought before us—as in the instances of Abel and Enoch, Noah and Melchizedek. And the call of the individual Abraham was for the origin of a new nation,

not absolutely for his own sake: and so perhaps afterwards we find individuals elected to special privileges for special purposes, but these are always cases where the individual, though not used altogether as a literal instrument without regard to his own good, is yet merged in the ultimate aims of his office or his mission. The apparently arbitrary separation of some men from others of the same community and character, absolutely and wholly for their own good, we do not read of in Scripture under the elder dispensations. The whole people of the Jews indeed were called, and called to be, GOD'S elect, and that too very emphatically for no merit of theirs; but then no individual of them was ever declared to be elected from being a Jew to be something more—from being a Jew outwardly to be a Jew inwardly.

In the later Prophets we do indeed read of a remnant (as St. Paul notices), but the assertion of a remnant only of the elect being saved, whatever other meaning it may have, must of itself suffice to show us that Scriptural Jewish election was not the election of modern Ecclesiastical Philosophy.

The kind of election which was distinctive of the Jewish dispensation was not individual and not absolute—not even for the sake of any one generation, nor for the sake of the whole nation of history, but professedly and obviously only as a means towards an end—an end attained in the case of the Jews, as it would seem, only after manifold apparent frustrations and variations of proximate aims. The being of GOD'S elected people did not necessarily confer any spiritual grace on any individual of that people, nor was it an unequivocal proof of the possession of GOD'S

favour even by any particular generation of that people. In fact the Jews could only be considered as an elect nation by virtue of the peculiar covenant GOD had made with them, and of the special relation which He had chosen to constitute them to stand in towards the world's Messiah, and not by virtue of any special righteousness of which they were made the actual partakers, nor of any special spiritual blessing which was irreversibly secured to them. And so far does their history come short of compelling us to believe that any arbitrary or irresistible spiritual influence was exerted upon them to secure for the great mass of them ultimate blessing, that it rather renders conspicuous the freedom of man in such things to a much greater extent than is observable elsewhere.

For considering under what special influences from GOD the Jews always lived, their history appears a singular contradiction throughout of the promises of GOD unconditionally construed. They did emphatically what they ought not to have done as the people of GOD, and left undone what they were especially called upon to do as such. For instances: they did not for several hundreds of years after they entered into their promised land strictly observe the Mosaic laws and ritual of worship: and after this they made themselves kings like the heathen, which they were expressly commanded not to do: and divided themselves into two kingdoms, one of which, consisting of ten tribes out of the twelve, was professedly idolatrous, and took no part in the worship of the other, and was carried away from their land, and never returned to it in the mass: while the other, under kings for the most part idolatrous, so sinned against GOD as to be carried away into Babylon, and was only

partially restored to their land after two or three generations of them had passed away: and after their restoration, this remnant, though they worshipped idols no more, yet rejected that Messiah whom they were elected especially to typify and proclaim. And now they have been nationally rejected, as it would seem, as once they were nationally elected: thus teaching us, one would think, if anything can, that the election of Old Testament Scripture was by no means either unconditional or irreversible, but that 'If thou continue not in GOD'S goodness . . . thou shalt be broken off'—is in all cases the alternative of the promise.

XV.

Teaching on Election in the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

The modern metaphysical notion, then, of Election cannot be considered as finding any sanction under the older dispensations—especially under the Jewish, which in relation to individuals absolutely excluded it. Under the New Testament the term is to be found indeed not infrequently, but still wherever it is not used merely to impress upon the Gentile mind a sense of their new privileges being wholly undeserved by them, it is probably used according to the Jewish modes of thought, and in order to show the Jews that the Old and New dispensations were both parts of one great scheme; that the Gospel was no after-thought, as it were, but that all was foreseen and provided for and ordained from the first, and came to pass as GOD had predetermined: and that thus there was an unity in the Divine operations evincing wisdom equally and love, and emphatically excluding and witnessing against all shadow of turning in His purposes or His promises.

Inasmuch then as the great fact of GOD'S election of some to especial privileges, and through the instrumentality of these to progressive sanctification and ultimate salvation, may be expounded and enforced to inculcate humility and a sense of unworthiness on man's part, and to exalt the loving-kindness of GOD, it may indeed be always and everywhere most profitably dwelt upon. There is everything in the recognition of such a fact which will recommend itself to all thoughtful and pious hearts, and which all such are bound frequently to contemplate; and the mystery of why one is thus gifted with privilege and another is not so—why one is taken and another left—resolves itself directly into that great primary fact which we are obliged to consider as irreducible and unintelligible by any faculties of ours—the fact of the Universe being a system of degree—a series of better and worse. But when the arbitrariness, and not merely the goodness, of this proceeding is insisted on—when it is displayed as the indisputable exercise of mere power—and when the Father of the spirits of all flesh is emphatically represented as the mere proprietor of the creatures He has made—the absolute Sovereign who because He can, therefore will, do what He will (and what man would not do) with His own—then it so alters the whole tone of the New Testament Revelation of GOD, that it ought to be met with a firm, and even an indignant, protest. The true and perpetual wonder of the world is—its grand enigma and constant miracle of mercy—that Infinite Power refrains from overpowering everything but itself; that so far from crushing what is weak, it delights in aiding it to grow strong. Yes, the gentleness of the Almighty—His tenderness of loving-kindness—everywhere cherishing life and

allowing liberty—this is the soul-subduing thought of GOD. And this is the aspect of Deity which the New Testament puts everywhere most prominent. It leaves very much in the background the old Judaic idea of Deity as an absolute Sovereign, and proclaims above all GOD as our Father which is in heaven—as one uniting an infinite benignity with His awful majesty, and winning man to Himself by even more than a sympathising equity: and thus by shrouding His omnipotence to judge, and revealing His willingness to save, it awakes in us that peculiar homage of adoration which is at once the highest reverence and the deepest love.

The moment, then, that we reinstate power as the predominant element in our mental image of our Maker, we not only bring ourselves back into the ages of a dimmer Revelation, but we also make large inlet in our minds for many forms of fearful superstition to enter in. The distinction between the clay of the potter and the will of man—which is an image of GOD'S will—is a difference in kind: and is a distinction so sacred that it cannot be ignored or confounded, theoretically or practically, without at the same time obliterating all the grounds of our moral estimates, and converting our ideal of the highest justice into a mere object of indefinite dread—of a fear which casts out love. For view it from what side we may, the notion of arbitrary and irreversible election out of equals, in that sense of Theology which invariably associates this with its positive contrary, does so essentially imply (what humanly speaking is) partiality, that it must ever instinctively give rise to opposition in minds deeply imbued with the Christian idea of GOD. The assumed perfect equality of those

who are elected and those who are not, and the infinity of the issue, make this a case not resolvable directly into the fundamental mystery of degree; and is therefore at best but the introduction of a new difficulty, which if it be unnecessary is assuredly unwise. But if such election to blessing stood alone, and unconnected with its hitherto invariable theological supplement, of an unalterable most awful alternative for those who are not thus elected—it might be less earnestly spoken of: though even then it could not but be felt as an irritating problem, how in an infinite Universe a Being of unbounded love could act so infinitely differently towards beings who all were equally the products of His Will, and in no way essentially different from each other.

This, however, might be acquiesced in as a mere difficulty —one among very many—irritating to the understanding but not contradicting the deepest instincts of the heart. But the moment there is associated with the notion of such election of the few to eternal happiness, the necessity of its literally corresponding opposite for the many, there arises more than a difficulty or a mystery—even a sense of contrariety to the very fundamental faculties by which we judge of the loving-kindness of Deity, and of inconsistency in the character of such a Governor with that of one who is not merely moral but also parental. Where the utmost severity conceivable by the mind of man is represented as exercised towards all but an infinitesimal few of a most numerous family, without any grounds of moral difference between the favoured and the rest, we feel at once that it is a course of proceeding which bears no likeness to the conduct of any father on earth, and therefore cannot be that of Him who represents Himself to us through CHRIST as

Our Father which is in heaven: and when comprehensive love and tempered justice are considered at best but as arbitrary exceptions to the ordinary and inevitable course of procedure, we feel that we are on quite other ground than that on which we are permitted to stand by the New Testament of Him who came not to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might be saved. To assert that GOD has brought into existence innumerable beings—all of whose endowments and destinies are dependent on His Will alone—who must inevitably and irreversibly be utterly miserable eternally—is to assert that which would repeal a very large portion of the Gospel of CHRIST, and would more than counterbalance all the traces of wisdom and of goodness which we think we discover in the arrangements of the visible universe: and therefore ought not to be insisted on, or assented to, on any mere grounds of strict logical deduction from verbal phrases of the Bible, which however true they may seem in their own peculiar connection, may be not so universally and absolutely true as to admit of being used in argumentative combinations without originating large elements of error.

And if it be asserted, as it so often has been, that this is a matter for faith and not for reasoning, for it is a matter of Revelation, it may be an honest reply, and a sufficient one, for some to make, that whether it is to be considered as a matter of Revelation must depend upon the principles which are employed in the interpretation of the sacred documents which are supposed to reveal it: and that on the principles of these pages, it is not found to be necessarily or certainly revealed therein: and also, that on any other principles which have been used to interpret Scripture

uniformly throughout, there has not generally been found to be enough revealed on these matters to constitute a reasonable foundation for any complete or exclusive system of thought or feeling concerning them: and that the passages which are supposed to assert these doctrines are not so clear and so numerous as others which seem to contradict them. To some indeed these doctrines appear rather as mere deductions from the letter of Scripture by the understandings of men preoccupied with mundane systems of metaphysics—efforts of the logical faculty to systematise fractions of the Infinite—conspicuous and critical instances of the carnal reasoning in things of the spirit which an Apostle and a Philosopher would both alike concur to condemn.

XVI.

Theology in relation to special dogmas—Sin and Atonement.

Intimately connected with this subject in systems of Theology, as most modern doctrinal books bear witness, are theories connected with the nature of sin, and of the extent of the Atonement for it through CHRIST.

The consciousness of sin—of separation from GOD and of discord in himself—is almost universal in the history of man: and this it is which lies at the root of all the religions of the earth. And it is not by attempting to diminish this consciousness, or by ignoring it, that any advance will be made towards the solution of the great mysteries attendant upon man's being and destiny. All kinds of theories and systems which are merely moral, or which treat lightly this deep-seated contradiction in man's nature, are essentially unsatisfying, and however much they may flatter and soothe

some at all times, and many sometimes, yet ultimately they always become unedifying, and even odious, as men become more earnest. Such men do not want to be flattered or to be soothed: they want to be healed. They are willing to face fairly and manfully the full truth of their condition and their destiny, and therefore can be content with nothing less than a method of Redemption which has professed provision for the entire extent of their consciousness of need. Their own being is to them an awful mystery—a profoundly melancholy fact: a seeming contradiction to the Omnipotence and Benevolence of GOD: an anomaly in His moral creation to which there is no analogy in His natural. And it is not, as it has been said, by slurring over this great underlying mystery, and recognising and removing only some of its mere minor manifestations, that the soul of man, when once awakened, will long be satisfied. If there be any hope of Redemption from this evil state, the most thoughtful will feel the most fully that it must be only by a method which involves in it a full recognition of the evil, and probably will be by one which will involve as great a mystery to the intellect in the solution as in the problem: all the light and all the blessing coming through that same moral portion of man's nature which is the chief region of his misery, and the only one of his sin.

And that great practical solution of this awful problem which is given us in the Bible comes to us under precisely such an aspect of mystery: as a Revelation which may justly be termed transcendental—wholly incapable of being explained, but yet not incapable of being believed. Rather, it directly meets certain fundamental requirements of the spiritual man, confirming many of his deepest preposses-

sions, and heightening many of his loftiest aspirations. Such an one will ever consider as lying at the foundation of all moral government of the universe, the awfulness of law, the inviolability of justice, the necessity of order: the inseparable connection between obedience and happiness, between transgression and misery: and to him it will be no marvel to find these great principles primarily regarded in any scheme which contemplates the restoration of man through the loving-kindness of GOD. The mere pardon of sin by an absolute act of the Divine Will can never seem to such an one so satisfying as that grand act of voluntary self-sacrifice which is the centre of the Atonement of CHRIST, and which not merely infinitely vindicates the majesty of GOD'S law, but also displays His character of love in such an aspect as to be most attractive and subduing to the heart of man. The great act of Atonement through CHRIST does above all that we could conceive produce in the heart that believes it a deep consciousness of sin, and of its infinite evil, but at the same time by the gratitude which it inspires for the deliverance from such evil, it produces also a living self-surrender of the whole man to GOD such as no otherwise could be effected. It recognises the two great indisputable facts, that GOD is Holy, and that man is unholy, and while magnifying both indefinitely, yet declares emphatically the possibility of reunion between GOD and man, by the change which will be wrought in the character of man by his faithfully and gratefully contemplating this Divine Mediator who has come in between the majesty of law and the sufferings of the transgressor by an immeasurably meritorious act of self-sacrifice. And through such faithful and grateful contemplation of this

Divine Redeemer, a new disposition is generated in the heart of man, and a new spirit imparted in consequence, by which the sinner not only is reconciled but renewed, not only released from the punishment due to transgression, but also made meet for reunion with the holy and happy portion of GOD's Universe, and for increasingly closer communion with Himself.

XVII.

History of the universal feeling of the need of sacrifice.

How this consciousness of sin, and this idea of the necessity of Sacrifice and Atonement, has been felt and exhibited historically, it would be well for us often to contemplate, as in no other way can we equally see the significance of the great act of Atonement by CHRIST, which is one of the very chief peculiarities of the Religion of the Bible.

It will readily be admitted that the normal state of all spiritual beings must be a consciousness of union and communion with GOD, and a recognition of the obligation of entire consecration of themselves to Him. A mere sense of dependence on GOD and a loving service of Him, and a grateful adoration of Him, may be conceived as constituting the spiritual state of the sinless portions of His Creation: and so long as this state continued, there could be no conception either of suffering or of sacrifice. This only could arise from a consciousness of transgression of GOD's Law, and of contradiction to His Will, and consequently of interrupted communion with Him, and actual alienation from Him. And this long ago confessedly has been the condition of the whole race of men—a condition which separates man's being and destiny from all else we know of in crea-

tion. New relations of a most important kind—generically different from all others we know of—have hereby been introduced between GOD and man; and the determination of these new relations has ever been the aim of the religious efforts of men of all ages, and the declaration of them the subject of all the Revelations of GOD. Man's mode of determining these new relations was generally based on certain true principles—principles indeed so true that they have been ever from the first either suggested or sanctioned by Divine Revelations. The most ancient and general modes which have been for this purpose adopted by man, and sanctioned by GOD, have been prayer and sacrifice. And in the fact that such modes have been perhaps thus equally human and Divine, we find a bond which connects together the whole religious history of man. The fundamental ideas of the sacrifices of all heathen nations were probably the same as those which were Divinely appointed for the Jews, and in those of the Jews we recognise the fundamental idea of the self-sacrifice of CHRIST. The base of all sacrifice, in fact, is the conviction of sin and of consequent separation from GOD, on the part of him who offers it, and the prayer and hope that his sin may be forgiven through such acknowledgment of it as the nature of that sacrifice implies. And the particular means which we see man to have adopted, was the offering up of something that essentially belonged to his external life in token of the duty of the entire consecration of his own inward self, which he had hitherto failed to fulfil, and had no power to fulfil thenceforth. The something offered at first was most generally something that had life, as the most direct representation of the truth that man's life had been forfeited by

transgression of his Maker's law—the life being supposed to be the same in kind, though differing in degree, in all the creatures of GOD, which was a supposition most easy for any of old to assent to. But the more it became understood and felt that the state of the heart—the sacrifice of the will—of the offerer was the only real essential element in the acceptableness of the offering—the offering itself being merely symbolical—there was a gradual transition to that stage in the history of sacrifice when the animal life had a substitute provided for it in wholly material offerings; or at least when such offerings became the rule, and living sacrifices became the exception—being used only occasionally, and as it were merely to recall the fundamental idea that it was man's life—his all—that was lost by sin.

And in the history and law of that people among whom the detail of sacrifice was expounded on the highest authority, we find this modification of the apparently primitive idea of sacrifice, though joined with others which had special reference to that peculiar law of type and ceremony under which they, as a typical and prophetic people, were ordained to live. In the Jewish law we find that though the daily sacrifices of animal life recognise fully the primary principle of which mention has been made, yet that in all other cases, such sacrifices were made for ceremonial, and not moral transgressions—three or four cases perhaps only excepted, where however the transgressions were also ceremonial, and judicial penalties were additionally enforced.

But clearly all such sacrifices were but symbolical at best; they had no real absolute value; they only testified to a want, and only expressed a weakness. They thus left

a large residuum of unreality; or indeed they could hardly be said to be realities at all, or more than the merest fictions, unless there was to be found somewhere in the history of man a true sacrifice which should possess in itself essentially the virtue which all other sacrifices could but typify. This at least: but even more than this. For the great catastrophe of original humanity not only disordered some relations of man to GOD, but vitiated the whole moral constitution of man: and therefore for a thorough restoration of the race there must be a thorough regeneration of it—an infusion of new vital power which by assimilating to itself all that is foreign, and extirpating all that is evil, should reconstitute the harmony and the health of humanity. This true sacrifice—one having virtue to fulfil all types and to infuse new life into man—was in the fulness of times exhibited in CHRIST who offered up Himself—a Divine self-sacrifice—and thus embodied in Himself all the fundamental ideas of the Heathen and the Hebrew sacrifices—including and surpassing all that it had ever entered into the heart of man to conceive, or that it had ever pleased the Providence of GOD to reveal.

This self-sacrifice of CHRIST—effecting not only a reconciliation of man with GOD, but also a regeneration of the nature of the race by the permanent incorporation of the human with the Divine—lies at the very centre of Christianity, and makes Evangelical Religion exceedingly different from all other Religion. And it is faith in this—a faith which implies a living self-surrender of the soul to CHRIST, and a devotion to Him out of gratitude for this His surpassing loving-kindness of redeeming mercy—which is the peculiar requirement of the Gospel. It is this which

under various technical terms and theological forms lies at the base of all the truest confessions of the Christian Churches: it is unlimited dependence upon this which is a free translation of that most important of all articles of modern symbolical doctrine which is more commonly known under the title of justification by faith. And truly this is in its spirit the very centre and foundation—the very life and soul—of all emphatically Christian doctrine. It is this act of self-surrender, with all the confession of sin and need which it implies, which gives, and which alone can give, a man the consciousness of being substantially at one with GOD, in spite of his actual sinfulness. For such faith is felt not only to justify, but also to sanctify. The moment a man thus truly believes in CHRIST as his Redeeming Mediator with GOD, he feels that his sinfulness may and will and shall grow less in him ever day by day: that it shall have no more dominion over him now that he is thus under grace; but that what no law could have done — subdue his heart unto a loving obedience — GOD sending His own Son as a sacrifice for sin has done, and shall do, until he be more than conqueror over all the enemies of his soul.

XVIII.

The Atonement the centre of the Christian religion.

This Atonement of CHRIST—which it must be repeated lies at the very centre of the Christian Religion—is to be received, however, by faith rather than by the understanding; it cannot be fully explained, either in its causes or its consequences. And it is most important thus to think of it: for much of the Theology which has been hitherto most

commonly connected with it, has been not unreasonably a stumbling-block and a rock of offence equally to the self-sufficient and to the humble. To many it has made the Gospel of CHRIST appear only as the power of GOD, and very little as the wisdom of GOD: at the least not so much a satisfaction for the needs, and good tidings for the longings, of the human heart, as a contradiction of its instincts and its expectations which has constituted an endeavour to believe in it little else than a life-long penitential discipline. Wherever the virtue of this Atonement has been limited, this has especially been the case: and therefore though it would be wandering from the appointed course of these pages to enter into any discussion in detail concerning even this great solar doctrine of Christianity, yet it may not be at all impeding their purpose to record a warning and a protest against any human limitations of the significance and virtue of this great transcendental act of redemption. To speculate reverently upon its bearings on what has been revealed of GOD's counsels, and on what we cannot but believe to be the general principles of His government of the moral universe, if we do not assume to define all its influences and its worth, may be legitimate and profitable, as it cannot but extend our thoughts of the largeness of GOD's love, and of the mystery of all moral being: but to attempt to embrace all its bearings within any coherent system which the understanding of man can frame or comprehend, and to pronounce dogmatically as to its limitations, is here judged to be irreverent and vain. If it have any reality, it may, and it must, have a quite infinite value, and any human speech of it must be necessarily inadequate. Even the New Testament does not profess to give an exposition of its full significance; and

it seems even to profess not to exhaust all the virtue of its influence upon man's condition and destiny. Indeed in order to check that tendency to dogmatise in so important a mystery of our faith which the history of the Churches has shown to be so common, we ought very carefully to study the great variety of aspects under which it is presented to us in the New Testament, and thus learn how even the largest and deepest words and thoughts concerning it are apparently unable to contain, or even to approach, the full measure of its grace. What He who was at once the Son of GOD and the Son of Man was and did, and is and does, for us men and our salvation, is not to be determined by dwelling on any one Scriptural expression concerning Him, but on all. He must not therefore be considered merely as a victim dying on an altar, or as a Priest entering a sanctuary, or as a Redeemer ransoming slaves, or as a Mediator of a treaty, or as a surety of a covenant—but as all, and more than all, of these together: as in fact executing a work, and exhibiting a mode of being, unique in the universe: transcending all thought as well as all experience, but affording to every inmost need, and every highest aspiration of the human heart, an appropriate and a perfect satisfaction.

And let it be well weighed, whether the Divinity of the Redeemer and the universality of Redemption may not be correlative doctrines. If it be admitted that there was a virtue in the self-sacrifice of CHRIST which has been the efficient cause of man's Redemption both from the punishment and the power of sin, it must be impossible to measure the extent either of that virtue, or of human obligation to it. A Divine Mediator in a human form must, as it would

seem, of necessity be equally related to the whole human race of all time, and one so related, and so entitled to the reverence and love of the whole human race, must be Divine, or otherwise man's legitimate gratitude to Him would derogate from the honour and the homage which is due to GOD.

And also may it not be said, that if we acknowledge the worth of the self-sacrifice of CHRIST to be infinite, it may be only reasonable to believe that its effects may be so too? And the more fully we realise the conviction of the absolute Divinity of the Redeemer, the more hopeful we may reasonably become of the possible future destruction of all the consequences of sin.

And then also it is wished to add, that while thus not in any way subordinating the strictly doctrinal view of the Atonement of CHRIST, but on the contrary always endeavouring to keep it before the mind with the same fulness and distinctness as we find it embodied in Apostolic Scripture, and constantly dwelling on the fact that there does lie in it a mighty background of theoretic mystery, it would be also well if we gave great practical prominence in the moral bearings in the act of Redemption—to that portion of it which consists in imparting to man a power of becoming free from sin itself as well as from its penal consequences, and of fulfilling the Law of GOD of his own will, though not in his own strength, from love of Him and of it. This moral Redemption, however, which CHRIST has effected for us, must not be considered as arising chiefly from His having completed our rule of duty, and set us an example of perfectly fulfilling it; but rather in the fact of His having exhibited a realised ideal of goodness through self-sacrifice

such as never had been exhibited before, and such as when duly and faithfully contemplated radiates an influence the most Divinely attractive to the heart of man.

XIX.

Revelation in relation to evidence: internal and external.

In another department also the province of the understanding in connection with the study of the revelations of the Bible has very frequently been ill-defined, namely, in that of evidence, and especially in the instance of Miracles as the primary evidence for the reality of all Revelation. Unquestionably external evidences—evidences that can be made convincing to the understanding—have been unduly magnified: and internal evidences—evidences which are derivable from the moral adaptations between the substance of the revelations and the primary needs and sympathies and aspirations of man's nature—have been unduly depreciated. But surely external evidence must at the very best be but partial and secondary: appealing as it does to only very subordinate portions of our nature, and grounded as it is upon assumptions of a most complicated kind: and having for its base that one which is the least obviously credible, namely, that knowledge derived from testimony is more trustworthy than that derived from consciousness; or in other words, that the experience of the senses of others is superior in certainty to the experience of our own souls. For such, however, as deny or distrust man's power of judging of truth and duty by reason and conscience, and who think more highly of his power of judging of testimony by the understanding and the senses, external evidences of all kinds, and records of miracles, may be profitable and even

necessary. And for such they have been provided amply enough at the least for the exercise of their peculiar gifts. But that such persons should suppose that they are standing on any superior ground, and should require all others to stand only where they do, this is not reasonable, or duly humble in them: for CHRIST does not give His best blessing to those who will not believe until they see, but to those who believe through the heart: and while He worked miracles for the conviction of those who were in the position of His adversaries, He ever expected His friends to know His voice, and to be drawn towards Him by His words. And why should not conscience be considered as trustworthy within its province as the senses are within theirs? The senses surely can testify of nothing but of power: they are no measure of truth: the heart after all must decide as to this. And if our Lord had not worked any miracle, should we have been less obliged to obey His commands, or to believe His doctrines, or to imitate His example than we are now?

Of all kinds of external evidences, that of miracles has been most unduly exaggerated, and a weight has been made to rest upon it which it now seems to many ill calculated to bear, and which, judging from the Bible alone, it could scarcely have been intended to bear. And if this be true, it is surely wise for all who have been committing to it much of the faith of others, or of their own, to re-examine from time to time the degree of the stability of their dependence.

Doubtless those objections which resolve themselves into the denial of the possibility of miracle are unreasonable. They proceed on an assumption of a knowledge of the

powers and purposes connected with man's history which no one can show that he possesses, or can possess: and also on that of the spiritual world being governed by laws strictly analogous to those by which the material world is governed. But the modes of GOD's operations can only justly be regarded by us as infinite: and in the small portion of the spiritual world with which we are acquainted there are more things seeming miraculous than things that we can bring into the sequence of cause and effect. All will and all original thought are for us miraculous: whatever indeed is spontaneous must ever seem to us supernatural. And thus there can be no conclusive antecedent objection of the metaphysical kind to the occurrence of miracles. The question is one purely historical, and to be decided by testimony. But at the same time it must be acknowledged that most cultivated minds have a strong disposition to object to any interference with the laws of nature either by spirit or otherwise, in any particular case, and more especially when the preternatural is exalted as more Divine than the natural. And for those who have been taught to trust much in spiritual things to natural analogies, so strong is the analogy of Nature against any miraculous interference with its laws by the great Lawgiver, that this state of mind is so reasonable that it may fairly be said, that belief in the existence of miracle can for them only justly be demanded on the production of evidence for its occurrence very much more weighty than for that of any historical fact. And objections to this evidence may often be of great weight when drawn either from moral considerations respecting the nature and purpose of the asserted miracle, or from those critical considerations

which are connected with all personal and documentary proof. And it should be borne in mind that the burden of proof lies always on those who assert the occurrence of the miracle: no preliminary burden of disproof on those whose belief in it is demanded. And then, too, let us remember that it is not obviously just to expect or require that the same effect should be produced on any mind by the mere record of a miracle that might fairly be expected or required from one witnessing the miracle itself. For it requires a very strong faculty of historic imagination to be much affected by the mere record of a miracle, and while we by no means theoretically disbelieve it, we may not at the same time be able so vividly to apprehend it as to believe it influentially.

And then again: we may consider whether the merely historical evidence for the credibility of the documents which contain the record of the Biblical miracles is very much greater than that of any ordinary historical documents. For the evidence of the credibility of the Sacred Books depends for a large measure of its conclusiveness on moral considerations: and if this be so, then if we introduce moral considerations largely into our data for establishing the credibility of the documents upon the evidence of which we are called upon to believe the miracle, we may justly also be allowed to introduce moral considerations into our data for estimating the credibility of the miracle itself. And if we do this, we shall find that ultimately we come to the result, that the Revelation supports the miracles as much as the miracles support the Revelation.

The fact probably is, that we are so accustomed in the case of the Biblical miracles to have the character of all

that is connected with the miracle so in harmony with our moral nature, that we are unable to separate distinctly the influence of the miracle on our minds from that of its moral accompaniments. If we could conceive of a case in which for any thoughtful mind the conviction of the existence of miracle, and that of the immorality of the doctrine which it assumed to confirm, were equally strong—such a mind would probably become insane. Wherever there is apparent collision now, we do not thus suffer, because we invariably gain relief by disbelieving the reality of the miracle through suspicion of the invalidity of the evidence.

XX.

Miracles

Is not this the Biblical view of miracles? Is it not precisely that which Moses gave to his people of old? 'If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass whereof he spake unto thee saying, Let us go after other gods which thou hast not known, and let us serve them, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your GOD proveth you to know whether you love the Lord your GOD with all your heart and with all your soul. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your GOD.' Here surely it is plain that the working of a sign or a wonder was not to be received as conclusive evidence for the Divinity of the mission of the worker of it: but that the worth, though not the reality, of the miracle was to be tested by its moral purpose. And was it not

also thus with our Lord and Saviour? Did He not ever place His words first, and His works only as subordinate? Did He not pronounce those blessed who believe Him without His working a miracle, and did He not refuse to work miracles to subdue unbelief? Did He not say that it was only an evil generation that seeks after a sign, and that there might be such signs and wonders worked as would almost deceive the very elect? And did He not say that if men did not believe through the words of Moses and the Prophets, they would not believe even if they saw one rise from the dead?

Our Lord's miracles were seldom worked to produce faith, but more frequently to reward it: they were more generally wrought as mercies than as arguments, and appealed to rather as expositions of the Divinity of His character than as evidences of the Divinity of His mission. And so also we observe that St. Paul, too, enumerates miraculous gifts as inferior to spiritual graces, and names them even among childish things. He never once brings forward as evidence of doctrine any special miracle of his own or of the Lord's—save indeed that great fact, or act, of the Resurrection, which was so much more than a miracle that it is not a conclusive instance to the contrary of this significant assertion.

And let it be noted that the working of miracles, wherever it might be most fully admitted, did not on Biblical principles prove anything more with regard to the person so working them than that he had a general mission from GOD as a Prophet: and also that the working of miracles was not a necessary token of the prophet's mission. Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, worked

miracles, and were still but men of like passions and infirmity with others: while the great body of the Old Testament Prophets wrought no miracles that we know of; nor did he who was the greatest of these in some respects, the immediate herald of the Messiah.

Observation of the effects produced by miracles in the New Testament history confirms this view. They did not possess much argumentative conclusiveness for the Jews, whose whole history was miraculous, but were most effective with the most ignorant heathen. For instances: In the Gospels, JESUS worked a miracle which, when acknowledged by the Jewish multitude, only produced the effect of their giving glory to GOD who had given such power unto men. In the Acts, Paul healed a cripple at Lystra and the heathen immediately cried out, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. In the Gospels, JESUS feeds thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and the multitude of Jews only declare that he is 'the Prophet that should come.' In the Acts, Paul merely shakes a viper from his arm, and the people of Melita instantly exclaim that he is assuredly a god. And add to this a consideration of the fact, that the Jews finally rejected JESUS though they believed in His miracles.

The truth concerning this matter probably is, that miracles are most duly thought of when they are considered as a peculiar class of facts intended to awaken men to a perception of, and attention to, GOD'S immediate presence—as hints, excitements, suggestions, rather than as evidences. Indeed no amount or frequency of exhibitions of physical power can of itself prove anything as to either the truth or the worth of any proposition. There is no kind of logical

or moral consequence in saying that one who is extraordinarily powerful must therefore be as extraordinarily good: and there is certainly no connection historically between the possession of miraculous power and the possession of infallible truth. All those who have worked miracles in the Bible were not infallible or immaculate: for to put aside the fact, or the supposition, that miracles have been worked by evil men or spirits (of which the Bible presents instances when interpreted on the same principle as those which are sought to be established by those who magnify miracles), it should be noticed that the Apostles were commissioned to work miracles when they were forbidden to teach doctrine—as in their first mission during our Saviour's lifetime, and afterwards when they did not yet understand even that JESUS was to die, or that the Gospel was to be preached to any but to Jews, or what the rising from the dead could mean.

And truly the faith produced by miracles is rather a subjugation of the senses than an affiance of the heart—a belief after seeing instead of trust before sight: and were this to be most highly prized, the blessing of CHRIST would be reversed. In our Lord's case, be it always remembered that miracles were more than they ever have been, or could be, in the case of any other: they were manifestations of Divine character as well as displays of Divine power—exemplary and didactic as well as evidential—and were in a special sense the befitting heralds and attendants of One whose dignity would not allow Him to strive with men, by making His voice to be heard loudly in the streets. But the real evidence of His mission was His Spirit, and the efficient faith in Him was the product of moral sympathy.

It was the revelation and realisation which CHRIST exhibited of the character of GOD, and of the duties, rights, and hopes of man, which were the truest miracles of all—in relation to which the miracles of healing the sick and raising the dead were but as arousing preludes or becoming accompaniments. Yes, CHRIST'S whole spiritual life and working—His whole being and teaching—the living image of GOD in Him—His making the actual and the ideal one in Himself—this was, and will be ever, the all-sufficient witness for Him to all open minds.

XXI.

Self-evidencing nature of revelation.

The essential evidence of Revelation lies within itself—in its suitableness to the needs of our nature—in its being a satisfaction of the aspirations, and an answer to the questionings, of humanity in all times—a confirmer of conscience, a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and an educator of the whole man: convincing men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and at the same time pointing out persuasively the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Thus to every humble-hearted man the Bible is its own witness to its truth—just as light certifies the seeing of itself. The peculiarity of every law of the Lord is, that it opens the eyes and converts the soul of him who turns towards it aright, and that belief in it grows with obedience to it. Its commands come so much as good tidings that they at once bear evidence to their origin from above: and the voice in which they are uttered, by its unearthly sweetness awakes an echo in the heart which only repeated sins can stifle. Indeed in

its whole tone and spirit, and in all its grand peculiarities there is that which is so sympathetic with the deepest feelings of the heart, and so superhuman in its proffers of supply for them, that no one who has once heard in his inmost heart its words can doubt that heaven has been opened for their utterance. To suppose the contrary—to suppose that a revelation from heaven will not substantially authenticate itself by what it reveals—is surely an every way unworthy view of an utterance of GOD. That GOD should speak, and yet not be recognised by a listening heart as saying something that man could not have said, and that there can be no assurance that a voice is from heaven unless it also thunders as it speaks—surely this is not so credible as that the Heavenly Father's voice cannot but be known by those who are indeed His children, even though it be but small and still amid the din and discord of the many voices of the world's great multitude.

And what is it really that first strikes the mind, and longest dwells in it, when we think of the evidence of the Jewish and the Christian Religions? It is not the thunder of Sinai, but the principles and precepts of the Pentateuch, that really authenticate for us the Divinity of the Religion of the Jews: and it is not the miracles of JESUS, but His Person and His Work, which are the highest evidences of the Divinity of our own. The rise and progress of the Jewish people amid the heathenism everywhere else around them, and the whole spiritual tone of their history—the Divine Idea which pervades it, and combines all its details during the course of centuries into one coherent and progressive whole—this is in itself so wonderful as to be

self-evidently supernatural, and reflects a credibility upon the isolated and physical wonders by which it is asserted to have been accompanied far greater than that derived from all other sources together. And so with the rise and progress of Christianity, and with the Divine Idea—yea, rather the Divine Person—that pervades it. Its history, too, is its evidence. The effects of the spirit which has dwelt in the Church have presented us with a whole series of evidences such as increase with time. In so many individual lives the fruits of the Spirit have been brought forth so strikingly and so abundantly, and such transformations of character have taken place through its influence, that it has left a long train of light wherever it has prevailed, which of itself suffices to prove its heavenly origin. And it yet works its miracles, and these as great as those which it performed of old. Every fresh heart converted from sin to holiness by its truth and love, by its promises and its pleadings, attests its yet abounding vitality and supernatural—even creative—power.

The truth may be, that external evidence is chiefly of use as a counteraction to external doubt: to refute infidelity rather than to produce faith, and more to remove objections than to promote conviction. And even in this region it is very questionable whether the internal evidence of Christianity is not that on which we must fall back more and more if we would resist successfully some of the effects produced by the remorseless assaults of external criticism. For though this criticism has done very much less to overthrow received opinion on many sacred subjects than it professed and essayed to do, it has done something, and it leaves in many minds the impression that in succeed-

ing times it may do more, and that much of our present belief may rest upon the foundation of an ignorance which continued investigation may remove: and so long as it is felt that the absence of such investigations is, or may be, our chiefest safety, there cannot but be a sense of insecurity and discomfort in all our creed. But when turning from this region as being only the outworks of our faith, and retiring within the interior provinces of human consciousness, we meditate on the Person of CHRIST and on the spirit of Christianity, we feel that nothing can be more incredible than that any external criticism should deprive us of any fundamental hope. The life of CHRIST, and His death and resurrection—His whole being on earth and in heaven, as revealed to us in the New Testament—this is an all-sufficient self-substantiating evidence and exposition of Christianity—the source of its vitality and the secret of its power. That the world should have been so benefited by a lie or a myth—that such blessed fruit should have been produced by such bitter or such scanty seed—that the noblest hearts and purest minds of our race should have been made nobler and purer by believing with all their strength in falsehood or in fable—that GOD should have allowed all the hearts that have laboured for Him most to have nourished themselves on a delusion, and to have fed others with the same—this is a supposition which by its reaction and recoil renders powerless the best constructed assaults of the most learned, and the most thorough criticism that the mere logic of man can devise.

XXII.

External not to be placed before internal evidence.

And what that is objectionable can there be in asserting the primary importance of internal evidence in things which can only be spiritually discerned in order to be of any real benefit to us? What irrational or irreverent can there be in maintaining that spirit is as discernible by spirit as by sense, or in being more influenced by the exhibition of truth than by the exercise of power? Why should there be supposed to be any danger in believing that moral power is as capable of impressing us with a sense of its presence as physical? or in refusing to believe that GOD can be manifest in the flesh, and yet the spiritually-minded know nothing certainly of the fact, but by the testimony of a purely critical apparatus? Surely there is more antecedent probability than otherwise that the medium of communication between GOD and man (most especially of truth) should be a spiritual one. GOD is a Spirit absolutely, and man is so characteristically: what then more fitting and effectual as a method of Revelation than that of spirit to spirit? And are not all human minds sufficiently judged of by their own expressions of themselves, without external testimonials to their worth or their dignity? Do we not so practically judge of the worth of our brethren, and that with adequate justness? Is not all our Natural Theology founded on an estimate of the moral quality of the works of GOD—invisible things being seen, clearly or dimly, by the things that are made? And are not the words of a man a large portion of his works? To take an instance: What other evidence do we possess, and what other do we need, of Paul's apostleship, but Paul's character and writ-

ings? Is it not on these that we now believe in the sufficiency of Paul's commission? And is not this internal evidence? Surely we do not ground much on any testimony we have of the miracles worked by his person, or on any external confirmation of his hearing that voice from heaven on his journey to Damascus which none confessedly heard but himself. No: The Pharisee converted into the Disciple—his spirit made a legible transcript of CHRIST'S —his words having been the means of regeneration to myriads of souls from his time to ours, so that to this day they exercise and enlarge, stimulate and satisfy, the maturest mind of man—herein lies the sufficient evidence of his apostleship and Divine seal of his commission—his epistle testimonial to be read and known of all men. And if this be so in such an instance as this, so might it be fairly said more generally that Christianity itself may be judged of similarly. Indeed very much might be staked upon, and proved by, the honest answer to the question, Is there anything known on earth more Divine than the spirit of the New Testament? Is not the Character and whole Being of JESUS CHRIST worthy of the idea of an Incarnation of Deity? If any man can point out any essential deficiency or exhibit any essential superiority—for him doubtless, but for him alone, other arguments are needed. But until then, for him and all for others, the one grand all-sufficient evidence for the Divinity of Christianity, will be the Divinity of the character and the spirit of JESUS CHRIST.

Wherefore to consider external evidence as primary, and internal as subordinate, in the case of a Revelation from heaven, is surely to invert the true order. Intrinsic evidence of the spirit of a document may render superfluous

any that speaks merely to the letter: but no amount of the latter could induce a belief of a demonstrable error, or a palpable absurdity, or an obvious immorality. And it is by this kind of evidence alone that the great multitude of men are able to justify their faith in whatever is not a part of their own personal experience: and it is on this kind of evidence also that the most highly cultivated minds and hearts will be found continually more and more to rest their faith in all traditional documents of a high antiquity. The historical and critical supports can seldom be made much more than sufficient to sustain the assaults which are made upon them by natural and scholastic scepticism: they are scarcely ever sufficient of themselves to excite a faith such as that which is required as an elementary condition of a characteristically Christian life.

And does it not seem almost unwarrantable to doubt that essential Christian faith must consist in that which may reasonably be possessed by the great multitudes of mankind? And if so, such faith must necessarily have for its subject something which carries in itself its own evidence—an evidence equally fresh in every age. And there is no evidence which we know of this kind, save that which is furnished by the appeal of moral truth to the ever renewed conscience of the race. All other kinds of evidences in the process of time inevitably demand and involve profound investigations which are possible to a few minds only: and in these cases he who is one of the multitude will ever be required to take so much on the authority of others, that he will feel it scarcely more a burden upon his faith to accept the moral results for their own sake, than to assume so much of the process of the proof by which they are supported.

XXIII.

Christianity based on the unseen and eternal.

But what is essential Christianity? It is something much more than mere Religion, as essential Religion is something much more than mere Morality.

The characteristics of all true Religion are the recognition by man of the Infinite and Invisible, and a sense of dependence upon a Being who is both, and aspiration after communion with Him. That this Being is a Person—has a Will and all those moral attributes of which the reason and the conscience of man approve—this lies at the root of all. A Personal and Providential Deity—this is the necessary postulate of all religion properly so called, and as distinguished from superstition and idolatry. A Deity capable of metaphysical definition is a shadow, if not a contradiction —a phantom or a puzzle, which the more it is meditated on tends ever more to Pantheism—from which indeed there would seem no escape when the logic is as rigorous as it may be. The essence of all Religion lies in unlimited reverence and love: and this can only be attached to a person. No mere Revelation of GOD in nature—in that which has no moral consciousness—is sufficient to excite us to a self-surrendering adoration. In Nature we see but laws which we must obey; for religion we must have a Lawgiver whom we can love. The deepest affections and aspirations of our being must find in an external object at once the sympathy and control they need—a Guide and a Guardian Infinite and Infallible.

And all Religion is in many ways closely related to morality, which proceeds on a recognition of a difference in

kind between good and bad, and a sense of obligation to be and to do the one, and to hate and avoid the other. Every duty which morality can enjoin ought to be a portion of the ritual of Religion. As the true essence of Religion is love of GOD, so must its permanent form be love to man. But in no case is Religion only morality. A man may be moral without being religious, but he cannot be religious without being moral. He may love man without loving GOD, but he cannot love GOD without loving man. Morality may exist without any practical recognition of any Infinite Invisible Personal Being of whose will the moral nature is a part. It may be simply obedience to a law felt as proceeding wholly from the subject of it, and not from any source external as well as internal: and as such, while frequently exhibiting an outward correspondence with the appropriate visible manifestations of the religious spirit, has really nothing in common with it but that which is thus outward. For Religion, it cannot be too frequently repeated, proceeds from a recognition of a Being external to the subject of it who is a Person, and as such has a will, from out of which will all law and life and spirit have their origin, and to which all things visible and invisible ought to conform. Religion therefore requires man to be consciously dependent and recipient—looking out of himself and upwards always, to some Being who is not only higher and worthier than himself, but who is the highest and worthiest he can conceive. It is a giving up ourselves voluntarily to such an one, to love and to obey, for life and death—out of gratitude partly, and in the spirit of submission largely. For again it should be noted, that essential Religion in man's case has its foundation not only in the belief of the perfections of

the Supreme Being, but in a sense of need and of sin: and a contrast between the Holy and the sinful thus produced gives birth to a peculiar state of mind and heart which is far different from any mere morality. This consciousness of sin, and this hope of pardon—in which this state very much consists—give a new character to all obedience, and to the practical relations in which we stand to the Sovereign Will. It permits no thought of claim upon GOD: and places its highest idea of happiness in regaining that favour with GOD which it feels to have lost by transgression. Thus it is far more than the recognition of law, and obedience to it: it is a reverence, and even love, of that law which is thus recognised and obeyed—an acknowledgment that it is holy, just, and good; and a desire to have it remain unaltered and our own characters altered to conform to it: not mere submission to restraint, but approval of it: in fact an internal spring towards obedience to GOD's Will tending ever more and more to render superfluous all external pressure.

Thus though Religion and Morality be separable, yet when combined and acting in harmonious union, they constitute the true type of spiritual life. In such case there is communion and conscious union between the finite and the Infinite, which is the highest conception we can form of any life: and a growing reconciliation between the erring human will and that Supreme Will which can sympathise, and heal, and harmonise all inferior wills, though in itself it cannot change. And as man's life recognises and obeys this religious principle, it becomes a continual self-sacrifice to GOD, and as such a spiritual worship of Him—even a continual approximation to the restoration of that image of GOD which is the true perfection of man's nature.

XXIV.

Christianity the revelation of the unseen in the seen—God in Christ.

But the Christian Religion is even more than this. It recognises fully this character of essential Religion, and acknowledges morality as existing before it, and even as absolute and eternal. But it adds to the revelation of GOD in Nature, the revelation of GOD in a Being who is self-conscious, and who knows GOD as He is known of GOD—who is even GOD Incarnate—and thus satisfies and surpasses all the needs and hopes of the naturally religious man: and through this Revelation it imparts a new power, and infuses a new spirit, into all who believe and receive it, enabling them to realise the aspirations, and attain the aims, of all true Religion. Christianity is therefore intimately connected with faith in a Person, seeing GOD only in CHRIST. Essential Christianity indeed consists specifically in an affectionate adoration of CHRIST as the truest Representative of the ever invisible Godhead, and as a Mediator between Him and us: in an entire surrender of our wills to that presentation of the Will of GOD which CHRIST has made to us: in a continual endeavour, through the special aids and means prescribed in the New Testament, to obtain within us the same mind which was also in CHRIST: and all this founded on the principle of gratitude for those mysteries of love which are expressed in the Incarnation and suffering and Resurrection of the Son of GOD. The Person of CHRIST, then, is the central point around which the Christian Religion summons all our thoughts, and which gives it its peculiar character. Not by new disclosures concerning the order of the invisible world, not by the exhibition of a mass of coherent doctrine con-

cerning the Divine attributes and counsels, does Christianity work with new power upon the spiritual nature of man, and surpass in the efficacy of its influence all other religions among mankind: but rather by its revelations concerning a Being such as never had been conceived of before, or at least but dimly, and by the exhibition of His relation to GOD and man, and of the position in which He has placed each towards the other, by becoming a Mediator between the two.

Indeed in this sense is Christianity characteristically a Revelation—that in the words and deeds, the life and death and Resurrection and Ascension of CHRIST, are expressed more fully than elsewhere the depths and heights of the Divine and human natures, and the Mind of GOD towards man. This Being of CHRIST—this is the living fountain of the new faith which has dwelt in the world through the Gospel; and this idea of CHRIST—no Pagan idea of incarnation and even no Jewish idea of a Messiah —this is the peculiar Revelation of Christianity. For no Religion or Philosophy—no tradition or imagination—ever conceived or expressed any person standing in the same relation to GOD and man as CHRIST is represented as standing in towards us in the New Testament—a Being alone among all beings—representing all the possibilities of the Divine in the human, and exhibiting their universal and everlasting relations perfectly. Thus CHRIST stands at the centre of Christianity—yea even at the very centre henceforth of humanity: as the One Being in all the universe in whom the real and the ideal of man are absolutely the same: and who was and is equally GOD manifest in the flesh, and man made in the image of GOD. The relation

of CHRIST both to GOD and to man being thus altogether unique, and the very highest conceivable realisation of the very highest possible religious idea—Christianity as a Religion is generically different from all other religions, and is the highest and noblest of all influences, as well as doctrines, which there have been in the sphere of Religion from the first until now, or ever shall be, or can be, for man in the flesh.

And thus Christianity can never be reduced to a mere code of Ethics, or a mere system of doctrines. The very essence and life and power of it depend on the personal claims of its Author, and on man's relation to Him, and on His relation to man. Even his own teaching is very largely about Himself—about His position in the universe—about His acts and sufferings on behalf of man. And all His Apostles' teachings revolve round Him—testify to Him, and not merely to the truths which He taught—and they ground all hope of human restoration, and a new principle of human life, on the great facts of His personal history.

Hence too Christianity is conceived of only very imperfectly when it is represented chiefly as an enlarged theoretical knowledge of the Divine nature—a superior, and it may be a supreme, system of doctrine: it is rather a Revelation of the redeeming and restoring—the saving and sanctifying—disposition of GOD towards man, through the special means of faith in a Person who imparts to us a new conception of our position in GOD'S sight, and a new power of regaining that image of GOD the loss of which He most of all teaches us to deplore. No: Christianity is not a revelation of doctrine primarily: it is a Revelation of

character and spirit which is an appeal to the heart—an awakening of the soul—a principle of new life—for him who truly receives it. Doctrine is but a part of its discipline, and knowledge is but one of its means of grace. Christianity is a life and not a letter only: it is an influence which brings the whole spiritual existence of man into consciously new relations with GOD: and its peculiar mission and office and virtue is, to make the Life and Mind of CHRIST the life and mind of man. And that Life, was it only Moral? No, it was Holy—a life from and in GOD: and that Mind—it was absolutely One with the Supreme. And therefore it is, from this peculiar requirement—this new commandment—of faith in this peculiar Person—this only-begotten One of GOD—that Christianity has a character distinctively its own—a character which never can be merged in that of any other religion: and that consequently to be a Christian is something more and other than to be merely moral, or merely religious—or both together—to any extent or degree ever otherwise exhibited in the world. And from its special promises and gifts, it is not merely a new commandment of duty, but also a new endowment of power: neither an idea nor a precept only or chiefly: but besides being all these, it is also a new birth into a new state wherein law is fulfilled by love.

XXV.

Relation of Judaism and Christianity.

Our perception of the peculiarities of Christianity will be greatly illustrated by obtaining a correct understanding of the connection between it and Judaism, and of the singular genius and exceptional character of the latter: and no

theological views can be considered as at all adequate which do not embrace some intelligible interpretation of the Elder Dispensation. The fearful errors, too, which have been introduced into men's views of Christianity by the want of a just perception of Judaism, render attention to this important: for truly ignorance here has been one of the most fruitful of all sources of mischief in Biblical Theology, and has affected the spiritual and ecclesiastical state of Christendom more than any other single cause whatever. A dependence upon the analogies and normal character of Judaism for interpreting the institutions and precepts of the Gospel has been indeed in times past, through the largest portions of Christendom, so great as to make Christianity in many of its forms quite anti-christian in its effects. And when we consider how even in purer regions fallacious parallels between Jewish and Christian institutions have been made the foundations, or very prominent supports, of large exclusive theological dogmas, we may well be very anxious to understand the real connection between Judaism and Christianity. The truth then seems to be, that the Jewish people were Divinely elected and constituted to be the recipients and depositories of a gradual definite Revelation of the method of the Redemption and Regeneration of the world through CHRIST, and that therefore the purpose and aim of Judaism was a true part of the purpose and aim of Christianity: but Judaism itself was but a special adaptation of the primary principles of true Religion to the particular circumstances of a peculiar people, in order that they might be prepared, and prepare others, in due time to receive an universal and final Revelation—one which when made must necessarily render not

only useless but injurious all the limiting provisions of the temporary dispensation. Judaism was professedly only preparatory, and therefore necessarily only temporary. Its chief object was to clear ground in the world, and to lay some strong foundation, upon which Christianity might be built—thus both attracting attention to what was to come, and facilitating the process of its establishment. Had the Lord JESUS CHRIST come as the first and only Revelation of GOD, His appearance would have been such an anomaly in Providence that, judging from what we see to have been the case under the more favourable conditions of the actual history, it very probably could not have been received at all in the age in which it should have been vouchsafed, and therefore would have necessitated a different history for the world, and not necessarily a better one, than that which has proceeded on the plan of gradual development. Judaism, therefore, had for one of its principal aims the connecting the Supreme Manifestation of GOD with the lengthened plans of His providence, and the determinate counsels of His foreknowledge: and as such was a scheme of government deriving its significance and justification from what went before it, and was to come after it, rather than one containing in itself its own end and interpretation. It was not a natural development out of what went before it, but a commencement of a new order: an order which was not wholly an advance upon the spiritual condition of patriarchal times, but in some respects rather a retrogression. It was added indeed more, it would seem, because of transgression than by way of privilege. From Abraham until CHRIST everything bears something of the character of episode, or parenthesis, in Revelation. Before Abraham

there is no trace of speciality and limitation in the Divine communications: all the promises of redemption and all the means of discipline were as applicable for all as for any. The Mosaic system was the first construction of a special instrumentality for a special end: and its chief worth lay in its value as an instrument: though as an instrument that was largely human, it might not be used for effecting any other ultimate object without having its own interests very materially consulted in the work for which it was employed.

The Mosaic system therefore must always be considered as an abnormal, exceptional dispensation; containing many principles, but no rules, of universal obligation: provided and adapted for certain temporary relations of a small portion of mankind to GOD; involving of necessity certain elements true for all men, but not nearly all that were true for all men, and some that were not true for any but the few who were its subjects. And even more than this might be said, not only that Israel was but a fragment of human nature, but that it was scarcely an average specimen of it: and in the very fact of its election, it was broken off from the mass, and moulded to a form as different from all others as the purpose was for which it was designed.

XXVI.

Judaism a transitional dispensation.

Never at any time, however, was Judaism a revelation of a Theology: it was not so much a communication of new truth, as it was a provision for preserving the old. The substantial truth of which it was in possession was that which was declared in that Name of GOD which was given

among its Commandments, and the great doctrines of the punishment and the pardon of sin as involved in sacrifice: but all other doctrines but these were to the Jews but shadows. Pure Judaism had no series of articles of faith. It doubtless embodied in various parts of it many truths which might be educed by the spiritual, but it proclaimed few to any others. Its worship being ritual chiefly, and sacerdotal and vicarious, and not social and personal, was but a very limited means of theological culture. Indeed, it is a most significant feature of Judaism that it provided neither for common prayer, nor for public preaching, nor for any popular progressive education: for it ought to be remembered that neither the Priests nor the Levites were in any way teachers, or offered up prayers of any kind. The Priests were simply sacrificers and executors of ceremonial: and the Levites, though when not merely attendants on the Priests they were consulting ritualists—ecclesiastical lawyers—were not necessarily any Instructors of the people. The qualifications of either were of the very lowest description—only bodily and hereditary, in nowise mental or moral. Nor do we find that the Sabbath was prescribed as a day of special worship or instruction, or to be devoted to spiritual exercises of any kind. All that is to be found in the Law of Moses concerning teaching is a precept concerning parental instruction at all times, and one enjoining an assembly once in seven years for the hearing of the Law. The importance and the peculiarity of these omissions are the more remarkable inasmuch as it would seem that it was the worship and instruction of the Synagogue after the exile which kept the Jews from that idolatrous worship into which they were continually falling before it.

Judaism was, in fact, characteristically what we are most accustomed to call it, emphatically a Law. It was a religious discipline rather than a system of instruction: a polity rather than a Theory. And as such it required obedience rather than belief. Their Law was not simply their Religion, it was all their Legislation, social and political. It was the very ground of their national existence —the very bond of the covenant between GOD and them. They had no other law but this: it was civil as well as religious: it contained their constitution as well as their creed: transgression of this was always treason as well as sin: a violation of their social contract—a renunciation of their covenant—a rebellion against their Theocracy. Thus the Law of the Jews was unlike every other law, and yet not a Gospel: a law which being given to its subjects by One who was at once their GOD and their King, made, and could make, no distinction between civil and religious, moral and ritual, duties, but comprehended the whole life of the individual and of the nation within its precepts. It thus, too, was complete from the first—admitting of no change and of no addition while it lasted, and only capable of abolition by being more than fulfilled. And in this way, and in this way only, has it been done away with: for it was not rejected nor contradicted by the Gospel, nor in any way dishonoured: but simply abrogated by being absorbed, and superseded by being surpassed.

It is most necessary that we should understand these things and bear them in mind: for thus only can we comprehend the relation of similarity yet of difference between Judaism and Christianity—in spirit and aim as well as in its provisions of grace. Consider well how limited Judaism

thus was, and herein how different from Christianity. As much as the spirit of Christianity is that of the comprehension and incorporation of all men, so much was that of Judaism separation, and even isolation, from all men. That philanthropy which forms so large a part of Christianity formed no part of Judaism. The Jews were cultured in aversion from the rest of mankind, and fenced against communion with them by most elaborate contrivances, which mingled themselves with almost every action of daily life. Not only were they so separated from all others by the arbitrary distinctions of birth, and by the arrangements of an artificial and complex religious ceremonial, but also by the all-penetrating peculiarities of their common food. The Jews were thus constituted into a caste among mankind—hereditary, not proselytising : one indeed limited geographically as well as otherwise, and which could not even continue to exist if it continually spread. It was thus limited and exclusive as no other religion of mankind ever was. It was not designed to exercise influence over the destinies of mankind by any immediate or direct spiritual influences : but simply to cultivate a particular race for a particular purpose—in which cultivation even the welfare of posterity seems always to have been more consulted than that of the existing generation.

XXVII.

Judaism typical of Christian truth, but adapted to a lower standard of ethics.

Doubtless though Israel was no normal type of humanity, and though the Jewish system was but a rule of tutors and governors which must of necessity expire when its subjects became of age, yet it is most true that Israel was divinely

constituted to bear a certain typical relation to all mankind, and that that system had not all to be reversed when they who were the heirs of better things entered upon their inheritance. Judaism contained the germs of the highest truths, and many of these when expanded became those which form the base of Christianity. For instances: GOD is to all men what the Jews believed Him to be exclusively to themselves, and the sacrifice of CHRIST bears the same relation to the whole Moral Law binding on all men, which the Jewish sacrifices did to the special laws binding upon the Jews. And the culture of the Jew, wherever it attained its highest results, was that which lies at the very root of all Christian life. Judaism was so pervaded by a sense of holiness and of sin, and so sought union of the sinner with GOD by atonement and expiation, that it contained the essential elements of preparation for that better dispensation which should comprehend without repealing it. But still, it is thought, that a recognition and remembrance of its imperfections are as much needed for us as an acknowledgment of its worth. And therefore it is now said that even in its highest provisions there are marked deficiencies which ought to be carefully noted. In its means of grace —not to dwell on its hopes of glory—how unsatisfying was it. For even as to the redemption and reconciliation and partial re-union with GOD, which was sought and found by its sacrifices, how inadequate and disproportionate to the end were the means—so obviously much so, that they could at best be considered as merely symbols of a reality afterwards to be revealed, but never seen otherwise than most dimly by the great multitude of the sincerest worshippers. There was indeed little that was necessarily moral

or spiritual about the acts which signified redemption, and less regenerative: their chief virtue consisted for most rather in dumb submission to apparently arbitrary commandment, than in the intelligent conformity of an affectionate free-will. Never did Judaism contemplate the entire consecration of every individual soul to GOD. All its sacrifices were dying ones, and few even of those whole burnt-offerings: it had no abiding consciousness of that living sacrifice which Christianity deems its most reasonable service. It so separated, too, GOD from both Nature and humanity that it never conceived there was any other connection between them than what was arbitrary and infused into them by irregular, transient, and local interpositions of an external force: and thus never aspired to, nor even deemed to be possible, a continuous, constant, complete communion of the soul of man with GOD, or the indwelling of the Spirit of GOD with man: and never therefore could raise its subjects to that which is the fundamental experience of Christianity—the consciousness of GOD as an Universal Presence, an Infinite Influence, an All-pervading Spirit.

Indeed a consideration merely of the different ideas of GOD which were cherished by the Jewish and the Christian dispensations respectively, is of itself sufficient to impress upon us how different must be any theoretic views of GOD'S purposes and dispositions towards mankind entertained by those who lived under the veiled light of the one, from the views entertained by those who live under that light which was unveiled through JESUS CHRIST. The Jewish representations of GOD are chiefly those of Monarch, and Lawgiver, and Judge: the characteristically Christian ones are those

of Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. The one teaches us to regard GOD as power graciously condescending to the occasional exercise of love; the other as love reluctantly clothing itself with power. The one makes GOD to be so much the GOD of the Jews, as not certainly to be the GOD of the Gentiles: and everywhere keeps before the mind the Sovereignty of JEHOVAH—His ever-active, all-subduing, irresponsible will—as the great subject of thought and worship: the other exhibits GOD as the Father of the spirits of all flesh—as hating nothing that He has made—as having His fittest image in CHRIST—so that whatever we see that JESUS CHRIST did or felt, or may justly judge that He would now do or feel, towards man, that we may, and ought to, believe is the mind of the invisible GOD towards us.

Truly these views of GOD are so different from each other practically, and of such widely diverse influences when made the bases of systems of Theology, or of any interpretations of the acts and purposes of Deity, that we shall never become maturely Christian unless we recognise these differences broadly: and it may be also added, until then we shall never wholly cast out the spirit of the bondsman from us, and become the children of the free.

And further let that be noted which is here implied, that in forming our Theology from the Scriptures we must ever interpret the merely verbal revelations respecting GOD by the light of a most careful consideration of His recorded acts. All verbal revelations must be modified by GOD'S historical manifestations of Himself, and when we consider the immeasurable greatness and incalculable consequences of that manifestation of Himself which comes

through JESUS CHRIST, we shall feel more and more that this difference between Jewish and Christian Theology may be, and perchance must be, of a degree very much more considerable than that which hitherto has been most generally admitted.

XXVIII.

Facts concerning the civil and religious polity of the Jews—Moses and Solomon.

The longer, indeed, one studies the theories which have owed much to the Old Testament records, the more one is impressed with the importance which a right understanding of the significance of the Jewish economy must ever have, and the more impressed one becomes with the misapprehensions which have hitherto most generally prevailed as to this matter. Some of the most prominent and characteristic facts of this dispensation are most frequently overlooked, and Jewish history is glorified and spiritualised by being Christianised throughout. The grandeur of the aim for which the Jews were used and constituted, and the infinite importance of the truths of which they were the vehicles and the witnesses, have reflected upon them a dignity which is not sustained by those records of their history which they have themselves transmitted to us. For the purpose, then, of somewhat correcting our views of the Old Testament dispensation in this respect, and in many others, and also of illustrating many of the principles laid down in these pages, it may be well for us to dwell on certain indisputable, and one might think obvious, facts in their constitution and history which every theory ought to recognise and to interpret.

And first it must be repeated, that distinct consideration

of the provisional and instrumental character of the Jewish people can alone render their history intelligible; and just in proportion as we neglect this consideration, and view Judaism as existing for itself, either principally or even prominently, we make GOD's dispensations towards that favoured people additionally obscure. Their whole history —their past election and their present rejection—must be under such a view much less significant to us than they are when we view them as simply subservient to our present condition of grace. The true view of the Jewish polity—religious and civil equally—must ever recognise very distinctly the fact that it was a kind of parenthesis in the dispensations of GOD towards mankind: that the Jewish nation was as a vessel of little worth in itself—nay, emphatically of clay—which derived all its dignity from its being used as a depository and protection for a Divine seed, which in the earliest stages of its growth on earth required special care for its preservation and development: and that when the fulness of time was come for the germinance and growth of that which it was meant merely to shelter and enclose, the instrument of protection was necessarily broken in order to allow of the expansion of the plant, and its fragments were allowed to mingle again with that general mass of earth from out of which it was originally fashioned. In this way only perhaps can the apparent arbitrariness of the original election of the Jews, and their subsequent moulding, and their present national destruction, be reconcilable with our perception of the wisdom and goodness of the Divine proceedings, and be considered as exhibiting a consistent and intelligible scheme throughout.

For considered by itself we can see little that is normal

in the history of the Jews: and that history certainly would seem as different as possible from what any one would have naturally expected would have been the history of a people, who for their own sakes primarily had been cultured by a specially Divine discipline. Putting aside those grand considerations which underlie all—how little of truth and how much of ceremony was revealed to the Jews, and how they ultimately denied and rejected the very Messiah whom they were with so much care and culture constituted to typify and proclaim—we see from the earliest periods of their national training and covenant constitution, that they did not observe even substantially the Law which they professed they had received from GOD Himself. Who would have expected that the whole generation to whom was specially promised an entrance into Canaan should have all (but two) perished in the wilderness? And then, that for hundreds of years after they had entered this land, there should be no practical realisation either of their religious or their civil constitution—no adequate organisation of their priesthood, nor any complete performance of their worship? How anomalous and imperfect was the whole state of society and of government during these centuries. The Judges surely were a singular supplement to a Theocracy—not being wholly divinely-sent rulers, but more often than otherwise elected by the people, as Jephthah was: indeed the only cases of directly Divine appointment that we read of are those of Gideon and of Samson. There were fifteen of these Judges in the period between the death of Joshua and the accession of Saul: and for all this time the Hebrew people lived as separate tribes, not only not in federal union as a whole, but in

continual war with each other, as well as with the tribes of Canaan. It was only under Samuel—the second Moses—that they were united into one nationality, or even had one common worship. And even during all Samuel's life the Ark was left neglected at Kirjath-jearim, and separated from the Tabernacle, which was at Gibeon: and the different tribes had high-places of their own at which they worshipped. During David's time, even, there were always two high-priests and two principal places of worship: and Solomon, who was no priest, it is said, went to sacrifice at Gibeon, for that was the great high-place; and so far from this being considered sinful, it was there that there were vouchsafed to him his choice and his blessing.

It was in Solomon's time, however, that the ecclesiastical system of the nation was first concentrated, by one only place of legitimate worship—Jerusalem and its temple—being now appointed, and one high-priest only permitted. Until this time the Levites seem to have been no organised body, and to have exercised no appreciable religious, or even ritual, influence over the nation. And until now, and for long after this, there was no priestly instruction, no circulation of the Scriptures, no general education: no observance of the Sabbatical year, it may be, and none of the year of Jubilee: and there was image-worship to an extent which it is difficult for us to calculate or to comprehend. We can find no trace of the celebration of the Passover between the times of Moses and of Josiah, and none of the Feast of Tabernacles before the captivity; and it is said, speaking of an observance of this after their return, 'since the days of Joshua the son of Nun unto that day, had not the children of Israel done so.' These things

surely indicate an imperfection in the religious and civil constitutions of the Jewish people, and that for more than half of the whole period of their national existence, which we never could have anticipated from a mere knowledge of the aim of their election, and which contradicts all that we should have anticipated from the whole tone of the Mosaic Law.

XXIX.

Facts concerning Solomon and the Captivity.

The establishment of a visible monarchy, was not this even a seeming renunciation of the peculiar characteristics of the Theocracy? Certainly we see that the visibility of the Theocracy gradually grew fainter and fainter from the first establishment of a visible monarchy, until at last, after the captivity, there seemed to be neither Theocracy nor monarchy, but a wholly mixed constitution in which the hierarchy was the prominent and predominant element. Most natural indeed it was that the Jews on that first feeling of nationality which was the consequence of the administration of Samuel, should desire that additional bond of it which an ordinary monarchical constitution seemed to the natural eye most of all fitted to afford. But that such a wish should have been yielded to as it was, must ever seem strange: and when we contrast the condition of the Hebrew people and state under Solomon with the contemplated Theocratic Republic of the Books of Moses, we can hardly fail to be impressed with an extent of accommodation to the natural, and of absence of the supernatural, which is greater than any anticipations based on Scriptural grounds alone could have led us to believe as

possible. And then again, when viewing the state of Divine favour in which David lived, and for some time Solomon, could we ever have anticipated the speedy separation of the Hebrew nation into two nations—an event nowhere prophesied of—and that these nations should have been often as hostile to each other as the heathen around them were to both? And that both these nations should have been so idolatrous as they were—all the kings of Israel being patrons of the calf-worship of Dan and Bethel, and more than half of those of Judah being similarly idolatrous —this we should never surely have anticipated on the supernatural principles of the Jewish history. Natural enough indeed it was that the tribe of Ephraim should vex that of Judah: for from the first entrance into the land they had been rivals: and for all the years between the rule of Joshua and that of Samuel, when there had been no other law of superiority established but that of force, Ephraim had gained a pre-eminence which it was not likely that it would readily relinquish. For a while indeed the superiority of Benjamin under Samuel and Saul, and that of Judah under David and Solomon, was submitted to on account of the obvious superiority of their rulers: but as soon as this personal superiority was withdrawn, as it was in the case of Rehoboam, the old rivalry broke out again, and Jeroboam (the Ephraimite, we must remember) withdrew all those tribes which had been accustomed to take part with his own in all the wars, civil and other, which were so frequent before the union under Samuel: and that union was henceforth practically dissolved: and never again re-established, for the kingdom of the ten tribes was destroyed by the kings of Assyria, and the people trans-

ported to Nineveh and other distant lands, and supplanted by others of a different race, whom they never returned, in any large numbers, to displace. And when we consider these things, and conjoin with them the subsequent carrying away to Babylon of the people of Judah (a century and a half afterwards), we cannot but be still more impressed with the fact that this history of the Jews is wholly different from anything that we should have devised had we had the mere aim and framework of their polity laid before us, with some of those remarkable promises and prophecies which were made to the great forefathers and founders of the nation.

And the peculiarity of the Prophetic order existing during this period, and exercising so large an influence on Jewish history, is a point which deserves some considerable attention. This order in the times subsequent to the establishment of the monarchy formed a kind of antagonist power to that of the Priesthood. It ought always to be remembered, and it is too often forgotten, that the Jewish Priesthood was not a spiritual function, but only a ceremonial one. The Priests were no moral teachers, but mere ritual ministers. The Prophets were really the spiritual element in the religious life of the Jewish nation for some centuries: and their lives constitute some of the noblest chapters of Jewish Chronicles, and even of the whole chronicles of man. But as a standing order, or even as a prominent influence, they do not seem to have formed part of the original Jewish constitution, though the uprising of a Prophet from time to time, as necessity should arise, is spoken of in the Pentateuch, where it is said that the Lord should in all times of peculiar

distress raise up a Prophet like unto Moses, to whose directions they were especially to hearken. The schools of the Prophets, and a standing Prophetic order, however, were formally established by Samuel—the regenerator, as Moses was the founder, of the Jewish nationality. These schools seem to have been a kind of monastic missionary colleges, and from them it would seem that the Lord oftenest chose His instruments: so often that Amos, the Israelitish Prophet, mentions of himself, as an apparent exception and even wonder, that though he had been chosen as a Prophet, he had never been brought up in any such institution: and Elijah and Elisha would both seem to have been presidents of such institutions. Under such organisation, then, it may be considered that this order of Prophets was a kind of supplement to the ritual observances of the Mosaic institutions, to remedy its imperfect spiritual working, and to supply to the people at large a source of enlightenment; and to be a controlling power to that new kingly prerogative which was not contemplated in the Mosaic ground-plan. At least this was the state of things in Israel. In Judah we do not find them to have been organised as a body: and there they co-operated with the Priesthood rather than opposed it. But in Israel, the Priesthood—if such it might be called—being so thoroughly corrupt and impure (almost all the true Priests and Levites having migrated into Judah), and all the kings, as well as the Priests, being professed idolators—we find the Prophets as an organised body, in constant antagonism to the Priests, and as the courageous monitorsof their kings.

XXX.

Return from Babylon, and the advent of Christianity.

The period intermediate between the close of the Old Testament and the opening of the New, is one which is remarkable for its own sake, but which is still more so in connection with these subjects at present under consideration. It is scarcely possible indeed to over-estimate the degree of difference between the primitive Mosaic constitution of the Jewish people, and that which we find characterising their social and political life, and religious opinions and practices, during this interval. And the difference is also strongly marked between the period immediately before the Captivity, and that established immediately afterwards. Before the Captivity they were marvellously prone to idolatry, and imitators of the heathen in many ways : attached to monarchy and their civil rulers, but disobedient to their hierarchy, neglectful of their Sabbaths and Passovers, and all Levitical institutions, and careless beyond all belief of their written law : with no public teaching, or social worship : with a simple creed, and no sects. After their captivity, they never once committed idolatry, but abhorred the heathen and their customs : they were devoted to their hierarchy, and careless in comparison of all civil authorities : most observant of their Sabbath and their feasts, and even superstitiously reverent of their Scriptures : with few Prophets but many Scribes : instituting synagogues for public reading of the Law and common worship : with a complex Theology, and Sadducees and Pharisees.

It seems unquestionable, too, that the Medo-Persian

influences to which the Jews became subject in their captivity produced a great change in their religious, and especially in their theological, condition. In this captivity of theirs in Babylon the Jews first met with a religion not idolatrous—the Persian—a religion which was perhaps the purest of all ancient religions, the most spiritual and the most moral. As far as symbolism was concerned, it was iconoclastic: and theologically, it taught truths which had not been taught prominently and fully to the Jews, but which became henceforth a principal portion of their creed. In the Jewish Scriptures we meet with scarcely any notice whatever of a future life, or a Resurrection of the dead before the times of the Captivity, and we do meet with what appears to be inconsistent with such a belief in the language of some of those in whom we should have expected that the belief would have been most influential. But after the Captivity, and even during it, we find this belief appear—faintly and infrequently in the Canonical books, but distinctly and repeatedly in those which are Apocryphal. We can hardly therefore resist the inference that the development of this belief was largely due to their intercourse with the Persians, in whose religion these tenets hold a place scarcely less prominent than they do in the creed of the Jews at the time of the opening of the New Testament.

One would not have anticipated these things: nor would one have sketched out, from any previous history or prophecy, such a political history as that which was theirs during these four centuries and more. One would not have thought, for instance, that without any forewarning or any national sin committed to account for it, Judæa would

have been several times conquered by foreigners; or that a hundred thousand Jews would have been transported to Alexandria: or that they would have been slaughtered in thousands while they were keeping strictly their Sabbath: or that their Temple would have been permitted to have been so profaned as to be dedicated to Jupiter, and have heathen sacrifices offered up in it—so that when afterwards Judas Maccabeus came to it he found its 'courts were grown over with shrubs as in the forest or on the mountain:' or that again, a century later, on the anniversary of its capture by Nebuchadnezzar, Pompey should not only have demolished the walls of Jerusalem, but also have entered the Holiest Place of the Temple: or finally, that this very Temple, whose glory was prophesied of so greatly, should have been so entirely pulled down and built up again by Herod as that after forty and six years of rebuilding, it might as truly have been called the third Temple as the second.

XXXI.

Future destiny of the Jews.

It is only by a careful consideration of these and other similar points in Jewish History—which however elementary are too frequently not duly weighed—that we can be enabled to form a just estimate of those passages in the Bible which speak of their future destiny. It is not here intended to do more than state the general nature of the result which these passages of Scripture are found to furnish on the principles of these pages. Those principles turn the inquirer's eyes first towards the judgment of the New Testament on this as on every other question which affects our perception of GOD'S plan of the moral govern-

ment of man. They consider that JESUS CHRIST is the clearest exponent of His own purposes with respect to the issues of His own kingdom: that the Old Testament can be at best but as a schoolmaster to bring us to Him, so that we may listen to His Revelations, or learn from His silence, in all matters which affect the destinies of His own dispensation. Now with regard to the special destinies of the Jewish portion of mankind the New Testament is silent, save in those words of our Lord recorded by St. Luke, 'Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled,' and in those of St. Paul where he says, 'Blindness in part is happened unto Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.' How little there is definite in these words, on the most rigid principles of interpretation, may soon be discovered—on any other, is obvious.

And the unvarying repeated declaration which pervades the New Testament is, that we are living under a dispensation which is final as a means of grace: one founded on universal grounds, and applicable without exception to all members of the human race. It declares emphatically that all men henceforth are spiritually on an equality of privilege: that the old distinctions of race and nation are over: and especially that there is now no difference between Jew and Gentile: that neither in Jerusalem nor out of it is there any place of worship more acceptable than any other, but that worship in spirit and in truth is always equally acceptable everywhere: that nothing in fact can avail any soul anything in GOD'S sight but its becoming a new creature in CHRIST JESUS, and that this avails everything. It teaches us, too, that though GOD has still an elect people

just as of old, yet that people is elected out of many peoples, and is not one as His people of old were: and that national relations, and corporate covenants, in spiritual things, save as they may be considered as in some sense embodied in the Christian Church, are for ever done away. Now this is an unequivocal, essential, inflexible assertion of the Gospel of CHRIST, which lies so entirely at the foundation of the new dispensation, and so pervades it too, that nothing can be allowed to be brought into competition or collision with it, except on the clearest grounds of Revelation: and any declaration of the Old Testament is to be modified by it, rather than it by any declaration of the Old Testament. But the principles of the Old Testament are not in opposition to this, though some of its particular declarations are supposed to be. For one of the fundamental principles of the Old Testament, and one which was implied in all its promises and in all its prophecies was this, that though GOD would assuredly accomplish His declared ends, and no one jot or tittle of these should fail, let man be or do as he might, yet so far as the means which He would adopt to accomplish these ends, and the particular human instrumentality which He would employ, men could count upon nothing but the fact that blessing would be proportionate to faith and obedience. All promises to individuals were conditional, and there were no prophecies at all concerning them as individuals; and all temporal promises to the race or nation were also conditional, and there are no prophecies relating to these in which a spiritual fulfilment is not considered as absorbing and comprehending any literal and temporal one, by surpassing it.

And with reference to the special prophecies of the Old Testament which are supposed to suggest or to sanction some grand destiny yet in store for the Jewish people —some reconstitution of their religious polity, and some restoration of their temporal nationality—it must be remembered that there is no such prophecy of any Prophet who prophesied after that great regeneration of the religious and civil constitution of the Jewish people which took place upon their return from their captivity: and therefore that the temporal part of these prophecies may not unreasonably be considered sufficiently fulfilled by that important era, while all the spiritual part of them was so much more than fulfilled in their nation giving birth to a Messiah who was the Son of GOD, that every remainder of promise which was left in one region, was beyond all their thought made up to them in another and a higher. There is but one prophet in the Old Testament who prophesied after the final return of the Jews from Babylon and the other parts of the East, and their resettlement under Ezra and Nehemiah: and in his prophecy there is nothing which can be even probably referred to any national condition of the Jews now to be fulfilled: indeed his last prophecy reaches only to the forerunner of the Messiah, and the general spiritual consequences of the Messiah's kingdom. And this is a noteworthy conclusion of Old Testament prophecy which we may well consider as suggesting to us that such is the end of all prophecy—Testimony to JESUS —leaving it to Him, and to Him alone, to unfold whatever He may please of the peculiar fortunes of His own dispensation. And this suggestion—a suggestion which prompts us to consider all Old Testament prophecy as concluded

within the limits of the old dispensation—is most assuredly sanctioned by the first aspect and obvious meaning of all the leading prophecies, hitherto interpreted, of the Jewish canon. Their natural purport seems to respect objects of immediate interest—things which must shortly come to pass—the condition of generations then in being, and their children. The later prophets more especially seem professedly to have been sent to encourage and console those who were in danger and in sorrow, actual or imminent. And surely in any case the giving to those who were either in captivity, or just coming out of it, and building their temple with swords in their hands, prophecies of what should happen only after two or three thousand years should have passed away—what could be the meaning of this? And yet what else but this did the Prophets Ezekiel and Hosea, Haggai and Zechariah, if what they said is to be interpreted as not fulfilled in any events which have yet come to pass? Doubtless there is a large remainder of promise —interpreted literally—which has never been realised yet in Jewish history—there is even a large difference between the letter of their prophecies, and any conceivably possible fulfilment. But what then? Simply that the prophecies of Scripture, and these among them, are seldom meant to be, and seldom have been, fulfilled to the letter—that most of such prophecies are but conditional promises—and that whatever in these prophecies has not been fulfilled in the letter has been either forfeited, or more than fulfilled in the spirit.

The true exposition of such promises and prophecies is to be sought for in the consideration, that all such words of GOD were spoken concerning the spiritual Israel only and

always—concerning those who were really, and not only nominally, the true people of GOD in the world—and were intended to be fulfilled substantially only for such, and only in proportion as such approached in spirituality to that ideal of a holy people which was set before them in all the laws and ordinances of their Divinely-constituted polity.

So far, however, as the literal fulfilment of these prophecies is concerned, it should not be overlooked that the Jews did after their residence in Babylon, and elsewhere, return and reconstitute their nation and rebuild their temple so substantially and confessedly, that no notice is ever taken in their own history, as recorded in the Apocrypha, or in the New Testament, of any subsequent want of integrity in their national existence or religious worship which vitiated their claim to be after their captivity whatever they were before, or even more than they were at any other time than during the reigns of David and of Solomon. It is true that the great body of the ten tribes did not, and not more than a tenth part of the two tribes did—so far as we know from Scriptural history—come back to their own land. But then also it should be borne in mind that all equally—of Israel and of Judah—were permitted to return by the decrees of Cyrus and Artaxerxes: and that those who did not return —which the large majority of Judah as well as of Israel did not do—were hindered from doing so by no persecution or outward force of any kind, but only by their own deliberate preference of other lands to their own—which is an important fact to be considered in forming any judgment respecting the Jewish character previous to the reconstitution of their national existence under Ezra and Nehemiah. How great a number came back to Judea after the Old

Testament history closed, we do not know. But that a sufficient number of all the tribes returned to serve at least as legal and formal representatives of the whole twelve tribes in the reorganisation of the nation, is repeatedly declared in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. And in the Apocrypha, as it has been said, the integrity of the nation is uniformly recognised. Between the times of the Old and New Testaments, it ought also to be noted, in illustration of many things, that there were very large migrations of Jews into Egypt—those under the Ptolemies even constituting Alexandria a second Jerusalem. But these migrations and dispersions seem never to have been considered as breaking up the integrity of the national existence, and in the New Testament the Jews are always spoken of as one people without any notice of any incompleteness: indeed the twelve tribes are more than once there distinctly named as having one faith and one Lord, and one hope of their calling. The fact is, that so far from being less one nation after the Captivity than before, the case is exactly the reverse—one great use indeed (if one may so speak) of the Captivity being the blending together again of the two kingdoms into one. And anything more than this kind of legal and representative existence of the Jewish people is not required for the satisfaction of any promise or prophecy concerning their national condition, for their whole constitution abounded in similar formalities: and clearly whatever will satisfy in this respect the promises and prophecies connected with the nation's giving birth to the Messiah, will also satisfy all other promises and prophecies whatsoever.

XXXII.

Present isolation of the Jews among other nations.

It is supposed, however, that the present state of the Jews—their singular sustained separation from all other people, and their equally singular sustained expectation of national restoration—that these things betoken that there is a grand temporal destiny yet reserved for them in the future. With regard to the Jews' own views of their history, or expectations of their destiny, they are wholly vain, and ought to be constantly ignored, as only tending to introduce an alien and confusing element into our judgments. The modern Jewish mind is so full of worthless and incoherent matter, and is so wrong in so many of its judgments, that it is not fit to give evidence on such a subject as this. Indeed a people who have made, and do yet make after a consideration of eighteen centuries, the greatest mistake it is possible for men on earth to make, may make any other, and put themselves wholly out of hearing in all matters where interpretation or comprehension of the revealed counsels of GOD are concerned. And as to the reserve of some grand temporal destiny being the only solution of their present peculiar estate, it may be said, that the degree of the separation of the Jews from all other people must be modified in the opinion of those who believe that the great majority of the Jewish people have become at various times and places—in Assyria, and Babylon, and Egypt—so blended with other nations as to have been lost—for as to their being lost in any other sense than this, it grows more and more unintelligible as our knowledge of the world grows more and more full and

exact: and also that there is a natural side as well as a supernatural, in this present state of the Jews, which has scarcely hitherto been sufficiently attended to. Unquestionably it is a strange thing—one sufficiently anomalous to challenge attention, and deserve investigation, and justify wonder—that there should be so many Jews in our times as there are: but this is the chief thing that is extraordinary. For that they who are Jews should always be isolated in all lands—among all peoples a peculiar people, and dwelling apart—is but a natural consequence of their previous history. How it could be otherwise with a people who had been miraculously moulded and elaborately educated for the express purpose of such separation for fifteen centuries, and had so involved themselves in contradiction against all other people by their intense hatred and contempt of them, and especially against all Christian nations by their treatment of that Messiah whom they ought to have united with them to bear witness to and to worship—it would indeed be difficult to say. We cannot conceive that clay which had been so long under the fashioning of the Almighty potter should ever while it lasts lose the shape and impress of its Maker's hand: and the union of the natural prejudices of the Jews against mankind, and those of mankind against the Jews, would seem continually to render their isolation more natural—the persecutions inflicted and endured tending ever to burn in deeper and deeper the marks of their original peculiarities.

So long as there are any Jews at all, then, their separation from others is not so wonderful: And that there should be Jews at all is a wonder only greater in degree, and not it may be altogether different in kind, from

some others with which the history of the world presents us. It is very conceivable at least that were our knowledge of the various races of mankind more full and exact than it is, we might find that the condition of the Jews since they were dispossessed of their country may have been allowed to follow natural laws rather than to have been moulded as once by supernatural: and therefore it may be but unwise to be building much on what may seem so strange to us simply because we are so ignorant. That this singular separation of the Jews from the rest of mankind, though they are at the same time so mingled up among them, does in GOD'S Providence serve an useful purpose, we cannot doubt—their being witnesses for the past might of itself be deemed sufficient—but that they should be kept so supernaturally in order that they may be restored to a primacy among the nations, is not the only alternative which may be possible for the future.

While therefore the present condition of the Jews is admitted as a fact worthy of much attention, it is not here considered as necessarily involving any specially grand temporal destiny for the future. It may possibly be that such destiny is in store for them, but if it be, it must be to the confusion, and not to the confirmation, of the most reasonable deductions which we are at present enabled to form from any data subjected to us in the Holy Scriptures. There is no expectation of such a destiny, no unequivocal allusion to it, as it has been said, in the New Testament: and this silence of such an authority would seem in itself the strongest of all arguments against it. Our Lord when He fortells the

destruction of the Temple, does not predict its ultimate restoration: St. Paul says nothing more than has been already noticed, which applies simply to their spiritual salvation: St. Peter—the minister of the Circumcision—in his Epistle, or Epistles, speaks of no other inheritance being reserved for any than one in heaven incorruptible and undefiled, which shall be revealed in the last time: and the Epistle to the Hebrews, which seems to stand as the uniting and harmonising juncture of the Pauline and the Petrine preaching, emphatically discountenances all notion of any future differences between Jew and Gentile, by showing how all become one in Him who has been manifested as the fulfilment of every prophecy of old time, and the antitype of every type. Assuredly the New Testament predicts no return of glory to Judaism. But does not the Old? Are not the later prophets full of most glorious promises and prophecies of the future restoration of the Jewish people to their own land, and the spiritual glories which shall follow to all mankind from such restoration? To this it is answered: There are no prophecies which can be so interpreted on any principles which admit of a consistent uniform application throughout: that whatever on a literal interpretation might be so interpreted is mixed up with so much more that cannot possibly be interpreted literally at all, that were the whole question to be determined by the Old Testament alone it would be at present for us indeterminable. But when we add to this the light which comes from the New Testament, and from Jewish history, since those prophecies were written, any such interpretation cannot be pronounced other than utterly

erroneous: for it in some points directly contradicts the very spirit of the Gospel, and in all so Judaises Christianity as to make it in its later developments a retrogression on its earliest. Nothing here, however, can be done more than to enter an earnest protest against such interpretations, and to assert that on the principles of these pages they must be considered as indicating very low and unspiritual views of the Gospel of CHRIST, and as exhibiting some of the most discreditable results of modern English Biblical Theology.

It may however be added, that the literal fulfilment of many of these Prophecies concerning the Jewish people is now simply an impossibility—for they assume a co-existence of a state of things which has irrevocably passed away. If we interpret literally what is said concerning Israel, we must take literally too what is said about the various nations by which they were then surrounded, and who are mixed up in all delineations of Old Testament prophecy concerning the glories of the chosen people, and thus in fact the restoration of the nation of the Jews would require also the restoration of many nations of the Heathen. Surely the most simple view is that which is also the most spiritual, and the converse, namely, that the Christian Church is now what Israel was of old—that true Christians are true Israelites—that as all Jewish sacrifices have been done away in CHRIST, so have all merely legal and carnal privileges and distinctions—that there are not, and cannot be, two people of GOD at one time in the world—two Divinely constituted divisions among the children of GOD; but that in CHRIST JESUS all such differences are abolished, and that the conversion of the Jews into Christians contains

in itself the destruction of their separate being, just as manhood abolishes childhood, and the day obliterates the dawn.

And then, too, consider that if these prophecies were now to be fulfilled according to the letter, they would have a significance directly the contrary in spirit to that which they had when they were first delivered. For when these prophecies were first delivered the Jews were not only the people of GOD—all of them the exclusive representatives of GOD'S Church and the absolute possessors of the Highest Revelation of GOD—but also those living around them were the enemies of GOD'S cause: but since then, for nearly two thousand years, the Jews have been the enemies of GOD'S cause, and those among whom they have for the most part lived have been the possessors of a higher revelation than ever any Jew could conceive. And surely it by no means follows that because the Jews were honoured nationally before CHRIST came, whom they were constituted to witness to, that honour should be continued or revived when they have now so long witnessed against Him. The whole significance of the people is changed, and never can be restored to what it was before; and one would therefore say, their whole destiny as a nation must be changed correspondingly.

But the promises to Abraham and the Fathers, and all the purposes of GOD'S election, which are without repentance—will not these have been made of none effect if their posterity be not more honoured than they have been in the past? To all such questions it is replied, that to have possessed and transmitted the true religion for two thousand years, and to have given birth to the world's

Messiah, this is a destiny grand enough for the posterity of Abraham to have accomplished, in order fully to realise all the visions that Abraham could ever have entertained; and that had Abraham seen CHRIST'S day in the brightness in which it has been manifested to us, he would have confessed that the Lord had fulfilled His word to him in a measure beyond all that it could ever have entered into his heart to conceive. This at least all those must believe who believe that the Jewish Messiah was GOD manifest in the flesh—for this was a fulfilment of all the promises made to the Jews so beyond their expectation as to be to this day beyond their belief. To all such it can but seem, too, the poorest retrogression to be seeking now for some further fulfilment of the letter of promises which speak of a restoration of the Jewish polity under a nobler form, or of any terrestrial glories whatsoever. Temporal blessings of any kind—much less national distinctions—are not elements of any promised portion in that kingdom which is not of this world, and to dwell on these as either ends or means of any considerable worth under the dispensation of the Spirit, is of itself sufficient to disqualify those who do so from any didactic function of the prophetic office, and to discredit their teaching elsewhere. And truly when such views are put forward as assumptions of a superior spirituality, and of a deeper insight into GOD'S counsels, they may even very justly be met with as much of sternness as of pity. For they tend to lower very greatly the standard of Christian attainment and hope, and to strengthen the natural Judaism of all hearts; and in the case of those to whom they more especially relate, they tend to restore those very feelings of pride and peculiarity which it is one great object of the

Gospel to abolish. A land flowing again with milk and honey—abundance of wheat and barley, of oliveyards and vineyards—unparalleled earthly splendour and all the nations at their feet—the fulfilment, in fact, of all the promises of an essentially carnal dispensation—could be no satisfying or coveted portion for the most elementary disciple in the school of CHRIST, or for the least in His spiritual kingdom: and the same kind of explanations which will transform these things into anything else, will also transform the Jew into the Christian, and the promised land into that heavenly Canaan which is common to all the people of GOD.

XXXIII.

General principles in the interpretation of Prophecy.

But these statements, and such as these, with regard to the prophecies relating to the destiny of the Jewish people, obviously involve general principles with respect to the interpretation of Prophecy, which it may be well for other purposes, as well as for this more special one, to dwell upon for so long as may suffice to have them clearly impressed upon our minds. But here, as elsewhere throughout these pages, it is not proposed, and it is not permitted, to do more than state the results of long arguments on these subjects, and just to show how the general principles and spirit of interpretation adopted throughout them, affect the solution of such problems, and how these solutions find their place amid these general views.

And first it may be well to consider, that Prophecy in a large sense is nothing necessarily strange, or violating the order of Providence; but on the contrary is in some

measure almost necessarily involved in human history. That the life of man on earth is a history at all—the development of a progressive plan, and not merely a fortuitous or incoherent manifestation of phenomena—that it is all governed by one and the same intelligent will, and has a predetermined and surely accomplishing aim—this fact would seem to render it almost necessary that one earlier portion of it should prefigure and prophesy of some later one, and that the various parts of it should be bound together by some law of growth, which would if we could see the whole, and which will in proportion as we do see much, enable us to foretell the general form of the imminent and the final future—much as we can now foretell the growing changes and expansions of the plant or the tree, the blossom or the fruit, from a knowledge of the early manifestations of the stalk and the stem, the branches and the leaves. Of course it is not supposed that any ordinarily enlightened mind can do more than understand the kind of future which lies before it, or can in any way predict the detail of it: but it is supposed that the principles according to which GOD governs the world are constant and are germinant: and that they reproduce the same kind of results from age to age: and that when these principles have been carefully studied in history and in Revelation, the greater and truer our knowledge of them becomes, the more able may we be to foresee the history of individuals and of nations in their general results, though not in the particular series of means by which these results may be brought to pass. All history is Theocratic, and the more Theocratic we perceive it to be, the more prophetic it becomes for us. If this be so, then the

history of the Jewish people must be preternaturally prophetic for those who study it aright, inasmuch as that law of education and progression, and that predetermined end, which we assume in all profane history, we have directly and expressly asserted in the very constitution of this peculiar people, and we have their history written with a truthfulness which we meet with nowhere else in all the histories of mankind. They were professedly moulded by a specially shaping power, and constituted from the first and always, and in many minute and complicated details, as well as in general, for the one great purpose of introducing into the world the Messiah of humanity: and consequently they could not but throughout their history contain embodied intelligibly those essentially true relations between GOD and man which were to be embodied perfectly in CHRIST: and therefore also they could not but be throughout their history prophetic and typical of Him, and of the course and aim of all humanity, in proportion as they maintained that constitution and realised those relations. In fact the Jews were in their inmost principles and laws of being a prefiguration of what was to come: indeed the only people in the world whom we know of to whom the future was so all in all that neither the past nor the present had any glory for them save in connection with it, and all of whose constitutional provisions were professedly given them as incomplete, and to be fully understood only when interpreted and glorified by the unparalleled revelations of the future.

The Jewish people were thus themselves a Type and a Prophecy: a people living by faith emphatically—with the duty of looking forward for their especial calling.

With them the spirit of the future lay always latent in the present, and from time to time moved, as it were in the mass, and revealed itself to the few. That which in other nations we call the genius of the people (and which however vague it may sound is a very important reality), was in this people—so Divinely constituted, and cultured, and gifted—a most active and influential element in their history—creative, or at least constructive, and leaving a strong impression upon every product of their history and on every manifestation of their mind, which not only made the Jews a sign and a wonder in the world, but gave to their gradually developed peculiarities a significance continually and increasingly prophetic. If we only understand how this was, we shall then also understand how a mild and lambent light of Prophecy may be considered as encircling their whole constitution and attending their whole history, which though condensiug itself at times into a brightness which the dimmest eye might discern, for the most part was rather a luminous atmosphere than an orbed blaze, and was evidence of perpetual Providence more truly than of repeated miracle. Prophecy indeed may be considered almost a consequence of Providence in proportion as it is special: and so far from its occasional presence being a thing strange, its absence would have been what one most would have wondered at: indeed if we would well settle it in our minds how great an event in the history of the world, and most of all in Jewish history, the Advent of CHRIST was, we cannot but consider that there must have been foreshadowings and prefigurations of it abounding in any constitution which was expressly designed to prepare men for it, more especially as probably it could

have been only in this way that the minds of men could be taught to recognise those astonishing realities which He was the first emphatically to reveal by perfectly embodying. That these prophetic intimations should have been after all so faint as not so to impress the minds of those to whom they were vouchsafed as to prepare them for the reception of Him whom they were ordained to typify—this is the truest wonder—a wonder which for many no attempted explanation avails yet materially to diminish.

And not only so was it with the events of their history and the whole framework of their constitution—that they all had substantial, though to our vision it may be often subtle, relations to the great end of their history and centre of all history—but also with the persons who were most conspicuous in their Scriptures: they are often in themselves, unconsciously it may be, but still really, types and prophecies of that Personage who stands at the centre of the great plan with reference to which man's whole life on earth has been ordered in the counsels of eternity. Every Jewish Saint, or King, or Priest, or Prophet, who entered into and realised the great idea which his nation typified and foretold, became himself a type and prophecy of it: and in proportion as he was moulded by the Divine Hand and filled with the Divine Spirit, became a forerunner of Him who was to come, and performed something of the same kind of office, and spoke some of the same kind of words, which were characteristic of the great antitype of all Jewish types. Thus the Prophecy of the Old Testament may be considered sometimes as the result of the peculiar preformative nature of the Jewish institutions and history, and sometimes as special, and it may be isolated, com-

munications of something altogether new—immediate illuminations of individual minds for the accomplishment of particular portions of the great continuous whole: but it is often difficult, and always unnecessary, to distinguish between them, as they equally have their roots in common supernatural ground.

To think therefore of Prophecy as only or chiefly external evidence, either of the Divine commission of the prophet, or of the foreknowledge of GOD—is a most inadequate thought of it. Doubtless it is both: but the commission of the special prophet was but a small matter compared with the Divinity of the large system of which he was the agent, and there is no religion that is so true as to be at all influential for good, but must recognise GOD'S foreknowledge as among the most elementary of its truths.

And also to think of Scriptural Prophecy as mere anticipated history — a chronological foretelling of the future—is neither adequate nor correct. That it is not for man to know the times and seasons of the destiny of his race or his nation, any more than to know the time and method of his own death, but that GOD keeps these things ever in His own hands—this would seem to be a general principle extending to Old Testament times as well as to those of the New. Sometimes it may be otherwise, but generally it is true, that Prophecy in Scripture is not to be conceived of under the form of an image of history thrown from the future upon the present: but rather under that of a germinant principle continually reproducing itself in the future. There are doubtless several predictions which can only be explained on the supposition that He who allows them to become

history, really impressed them upon the mind of the prophet as distinct and circumstantial communications from Heaven. But in the greater number of cases predictions have to do with principles and their effects rather than with persons and their actions—more often with the progress of a cause and its representatives than with the detail of unconnected events; and generally rather indicate only the tendency of the present in its course through the future, than point out the particular series of means through which that course will eventually be accomplished.

Let it be remembered then that Prophecy in the Bible does not most frequently denote what we have come principally to associate with the term, a foretelling of future history, but rather the communication of any kind of knowledge which is founded upon special Revelation: not simply of that which is future, but of all that which is naturally hidden. The announcement of the future is often one element of it, because the future is one of those things which is for the most part thus naturally hidden: but it is not an essential element of it always. Very far from this: and it would be well to get this first prepossession of our minds thoroughly corrected by carefully counting up the number of historical events which have been foretold by Scriptural prophecies. When we do so, we find the instances of prophets foretelling future historical events of any kind during long centuries comparatively rare, and of their foretelling distant events with chronological accuracy exceedingly so. Indeed before Daniel, if then, there is not any chronological prophecy of the time when the Messiah should appear. We certainly find some near and special occurrences so foretold

—as for instances, Isaiah's prediction of the destruction of Sennacherib; and Jeremiah's of the death of Shallum, the son of Josiah, in prison; and Ezekiel's of the escape of Zedekiah, and his being retaken and blinded and carried to Babylon—and some few more of this kind—but even in these cases it is notable that the prophetic gift is used, as the gift of working material miracles is for the most part used throughout Scriptural history, as an evidence of the general commission of the messengers of GOD, and to challenge attention to what else they might say—that is, for far greater spiritual ends than any mere anticipation of historical knowledge.

Indeed it should be observed that several of the prophets never predicted anything in a modern sense. From Moses to Samuel—three hundred years and more—there is no record of any such prophecy: and the prophecies of Samuel—one of the very greatest of the prophets—where are they? And the Jews ever have called, and now do call, the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, Prophetical, though they contain nothing whatever that we should call Prophecy. The fact really is, that insight rather than foresight was the characteristic of the Scriptural Prophet. The Revelations with which such an one was favoured were far more frequently connected with duty than with knowledge—with the known than with the unknown—with the present, therefore, rather than with the future. The foretelling of coming events was but a comparatively infrequent and subordinate part of the mission of a prophet: his special calling was for the most part to arouse the people, and to rebuke the priests, and thus to secure the performance of acknowledged duties, and to be the source of popular

enlightenment and general religious reformation. And for this purpose the gifts most needed were a keener sensibility to spiritual truths, a deeper sympathy with the nation's interests, and a purer heart to see more of GOD. And with these the Jewish Prophet was gifted, so that by such spiritual illumination he could and did reveal and apply germinant ideas, and penetrate into what lay beneath all forms, and disclose the secrets of many hearts: but his vision was often at the same time so limited as not to foresee the particular events and personages of a distant futurity, but only the sure spiritual fulfilment of certain courses of conduct, and the results of certain principles—the idea of an ultimate victory of the righteous, whatever might be the intermediate suffering, being the uniform and sustaining faith which pervades them all.

And again, we should note that Prophecy when it does relate to the future, if it relate also to the distant, is most frequently only conditional promise: and so frequently are the conditions expressed that we have good reason to suppose them always implied wherever they are not expressed. The general conditions are very emphatically and fully laid down in the well-known passages in the Pentateuch, which may stand for the types of all prophecies to the Jewish nation; and those critical passages in which GOD is represented as saying through Moses, 'And ye shall know my breach of promise,' and through Samuel, 'I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before Me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from Me,' may be but indices of an implied reservation running

throughout all the general declarations of good and evil which are connected with the personages having public and representative characters or offices, and whose value as means, rather than whose worth as ends, is ever principally regarded in the grand processes of Providence. The fact is that prophecies of spiritual blessings, and of any blessings under the Jewish dispensation where spiritual and temporal were so intimately blended, do not admit of outward fulfilments more exact than to the degree in which the historical subject faithfully represents its idea.

And not only this: but if it were fully admitted, and carefully remembered, that the Jewish people was but an agent and an instrument of certain Divine purposes extending far beyond themselves, and that these purposes were purely spiritual, it would readily be seen that, in proportion as the agents and instruments were imperfect, and the purposes not yet accomplished, the promises could never be but partially performed to the letter. They were always intended, and always performed, in relation only to the spiritual portion—the only essential nucleus and real vitality—of the Jewish people; and in so far as the outward appearance did not correspond to the inward reality, they were not performed, and could not reasonably be expected to be performed.

And yet consider further: is not symbolical and emblematic speech the method which GOD has uniformly chosen in which to convey sustained prophecy? Scattered prophetic intimations there may be in more ordinary language—though these are not numerous—but there are none which are at all expanded and prolonged in detail

which are not written thus indirectly. But symbols and emblems depend for their significance on already recognised conceptions. And how is it possible that a notion of a thing of a new and unknown kind conveyed in such language can be true to the letter? How describe new heavens and a new earth but in language derived from the characteristics of the old? Can imagery be ever anything but a higher degree of the same kind as that which is familiar—anything more than a new combination of old elements? How therefore could the Gospel dispensation be spoken of prophetically except under the drapery of Jewish figures—the highest known emblems of worship and of blessing—Priests and Sacrifices, a Temple and a City—being magnified and glorified indefinitely, and used in that superlative estate to symbolise and illustrate the spiritual glories of the future? But if so, how entirely to counteract their very spirit must be to interpret them only according to their letter? And how could it be otherwise than that the ultimate fulfilment of such prophecy must be at once both spiritually greater and historically other, than the mere words of the prophecy itself—the actual Messiah being so much more than the prophetic, and overflowing by the Divinity of His nature all the capacities of human speech?

XXXIV.

Further illustration of these principles.

The conviction of the truth of these principles might be much strengthened by observing the manner in which many general prophecies have been pronounced in Scripture to have been fulfilled, and in which also those pro-

phecies which have most of the appearance of being chronological have not been fulfilled to the letter.

With regard to the fulfilment of the more general prophecies, we cannot but be struck with the very little correspondence there is in the history of the Jewish people with anything which we could have anticipated would have been their history, if we had only known the earliest prophecies and promises concerning them. Nothing from first to last could have well been more different from the expectations in such case raised in us: for from the first startling fact of none of those who came out of Egypt—save only two, of whom Moses was not one—being allowed to enter into the land which seemed so plainly promised them, to that other most wonderful fact of the Jewish nation not recognising but emphatically denying (even unto this day) that Messiah whom for fifteen hundred years they had been miraculously trained to typify and receive—their history would seem to be but a continuous series of events which contradict all that it would have entered into our minds naturally to conceive. And surely this last fact alone—that the Jewish people thus in the mass appeared to frustrate the very main object of their election—this must permit, and may require, us to seek for a fulfilment of the promises and prophecies of blessing once made to them, as different from that which we might otherwise have expected as their history has been from all that their election and constitution would have originally led us to suppose. But more than this; when we examine particular prophecies which clearly related wholly to what is now past (for instance, that as to the glory of the second Temple by Haggai, or that by Jeremiah which spoke of the return of all the Jews

to Jerusalem after seventy years) we see that they have been fulfilled in a sense which does not correspond to the letter: and therefore if a fulfilment in the spirit to the spiritual, and only so far as the actual corresponded with the ideal, is considered insufficient, there remains no alternative obvious to many but to say that they have failed—a saying to which the principles of these pages do not permit us to consent.

And when we see in what way many of the prophecies of the Old Testament are said by the Scriptures themselves to have been fulfiled, our conviction that a literal fulfilment was never intended, and cannot be expected, is considerably strengthened. Who would have thought, had they not been so taught, that the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost? or that all that is said in Isaiah about new heavens and a new earth would be considered as satisfied by the earlier stages of the dispensation under which we live? Let any one who has not examined this subject carefully consider these things, and the like, and be will probably need no other suggestion to render reasonable to him the saying, that the language of prophecy is constructed on a scale which differs considerably from that of the language of history. But if he should need more, let him also examine how in prophecies which confessedly relate but to small historical events, terms which can scarcely be magnified are used to represent them: the most magnificent of symbols being used to indicate what seem to us but insignificant points in the history either of the world or of the Church—some transient burden of Babylon or some temporary prosperity of Israel: yea, even only some partial famine or some passing pestilence.

And the great bulk of the prophecies of Ezekiel, how can these, which are so thoroughly Jewish and Babylonian in their letter, be ever literally fulfilled in our Christian future? And what has there been ever corresponding to their letter in any history of the Jews or of the world?

And as to the fulfilment of the chronological prophecies, we are met at the outset with the remarkable fulfilment given to that made to Abraham respecting the oppression of his descendants by the Egyptians for four hundred years. The complete fulfilment of this is asserted several times in Scripture, even to the year and to the day: and yet the historical fulfilment fell short of it, on any calculation that has yet been made by any one, by at least a half. Would not this, if it stood alone, disconcert all our prepossessions, and nullify all our notions of what must be? A certain roundness of numbers, and spaciousness of margin, we may readily anticipate, when whole centuries are in question, but in this case there would seem more than on any literal principles whatsoever we can account for. And even in that other great prophecy of years—Jeremiah's prophecy of the Babylonish captivity of Judah—there is no accuracy to the letter. The very conception, indeed, we traditionally obtain of a captivity is itself a somewhat inexact one. It is better described as a carrying away into Babylon—a gradual expatriation—a compulsory emigration—rather than any repetition of Egyptian bondage. The Jews were never at any time treated as slaves, but on the contrary were placed as privileged inhabitants of noble cities, and had so many more temporal enjoyments there than at home that the large majority of the whole people, when they received permission to return to their

own land, preferred remaining where they were. And perhaps also we scarcely consider how very gradual these removals were. That of Israel was spread over twenty years: that of Judah at least over ten. In the case of Judah (whose carrying away is the only one, notably enough, much spoken of in later Scripture, though so much the more inconsiderable in numbers) there were two principal removals: one in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (598, B.C.), when eighteen thousand of the people were carried away, and Zedekiah made tributary: and the other not until Zedekiah's rebellion (588 B.C.), when he and most of his people were carried away, and the Temple burned. Jeremiah indeed would seem to make three removals, but also apparently estimates the numbers carried away in all three at less than five thousand: and the book of Daniel would seem to mention a removal earlier than any of these: but however this be, there is an equally considerable indeterminateness in the period from which the commencement of the fulfilment of Jeremiah's prophecy must be dated: for the return of the Jews from Babylon, and the other nations and places whither they were scattered, was even more gradual than their expatriation, occupying perhaps a whole century. It was, however, when the decree of Cyrus was published, permitting, and even exhorting, all the Jews throughout his dominions (which would include the ten tribes as well as the two) to return to their own land—which was in 536, B.C.—that their captivity really ceased; and this was only sixty-two years after its very earliest commencement. And in this year advantage began to be taken of this decree by forty thousand Jews who came from Babylon, with slaves and cattle,

under Zerubbabel. These laid the foundation of the second Temple fifty-three years after the destruction of the first. This Temple, however, was not dedicated until 516, B.C.—which was seventy-three years after the destruction of the first, and eighty-two years after the commencement of the carrying away. No more Jews, however, are recorded as returning, for the next fifty years or more, until 458, B.C., when Ezra comes up from Babylon with about five thousand more. But about twelve years afterwards Nehemiah gains permission to build the walls of Jerusalem, and from this time dates a continual gradual returning of Jews—the numerical measure of which we cannot ascertain, as the history which we have in the Old Testament is not continued beyond this period. Out of these dates, doubtless, we may select such as substantially satisfy the conditions of Jeremiah's prophecy, but still that prophecy, it is thought, would not beforehand have led any one to anticipate the history which fulfilled it.

Nor did any prophecy of the Old Testament lead those to whom it was given to anticipate the history which followed. Indeed it would be very instructive to consider how much less prophecy and type conjoined did teach the Jews than we generally suppose that they ought to have done. After fifteen hundred years of such teaching we find that they did not understand—any more than they understand now—that their Messiah was to be an Incarnation of Godhead: that He was to be born as a child: and that He was to die: or even that He was to be more than an immortal King of the Jews and conqueror of the Gentiles —no Saviour of mankind.

But in this glorious fact which they did not recognise

lies the full and superabundant reply to all objections which may arise to that view of the prophecy of the Old Testament and its fulfilment which has been now expressed. Through CHRIST no prophecy and no promise of GOD to the Jews has failed—no jot nor tittle has passed away without having been overflowingly fulfilled in spirit. All the prophecies of the Old Testament are in CHRIST, Yea, and in Him, Amen. No Hebrew prophet hoped for, or foretold, such a Messiah as He is. However hyperbolical prophecies may at any time appear compared with their historic fulfilment in the personages and events of human history, the spiritual fulfilment of the central idea of all prophecy has surpassed all human expectation, and revealed GOD to man, and reconciled man to GOD, in a way as much higher than Jewish type or prophecy led the Jew to anticipate as heaven is higher than the earth. True it is that Circumcision, and the Passover, and the Priesthood of Aaron, and the like, were all said to be everlasting covenants, and that the impression of every Jew was that the gift of the land of Canaan and the covenant of His law were irrevocable—and yet they all have ceased. But is the word of the Lord not true? has ought failed of the gracious things which He promised to His people? GOD forbid: if in all prophecy the history is less than the letter, the spirit is greater. The Baptism of the HOLY GHOST, the Supper of the Lord, the Intercession of CHRIST—are not these more than the Jew was promised by his types? The Gospel—with its Divine Mediator and indwelling sanctifier, its Resurrection from the dead and everlasting Life, its rich means of grace and bright hopes of glory—is not this more than was shadowed by the Law? And the inheritance of

the land promised to Abraham, has it not surely been repaid a hundredfold by an entrance upon that inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled and fadeth not away?

XXXV.

Prophecies of the New Testament.

But what of the Prophecies of the New Testament? These are in some respects very different from those of the Old. Under the New Testament there seems naturally less place for prophecy in its modern sense, as our dispensation is not introductory to any other, so far as discipline or grace is concerned, but absolutely final, and irrevocable in kind; and the testimony to JESUS which of old time was necessarily prophecy, for our time is history. And the mere foretelling of future events for its own sake is by it firmly denied us in those words which ought ever to be in our minds, 'It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power.' Nor is it needed as evidence to all generations of the Church, to display the perpetual interest which GOD takes in His people, as it might have been, in a secondary sense, needed of old: for in that one great manifestation of Deity in the flesh in the Person of the Son, we have the highest pledge of such Providence that it is possible for the mind of man to conceive. The teacher of a people whose whole significance depended upon the future, had necessarily to speak much of that future: his chief duty and mission was to turn all eyes upon that which was to come—to arouse interest, to instil faith, to sustain hope, in an invisible Messiah. To the earlier ages to whom the reason and spirit of their Divinely appointed discipline

were so little revealed—who were guided and governed principally by temporal rewards and punishments, and whose whole dispensation was comparatively carnal—there was a fitness in the bestowment of frequent assurances that all the events which would happen to them were as much foreknown and provided for in the Divine counsels as those which had actually taken place. Indeed prophecy was to them, as it has already been said, an almost necessary accompaniment of that system of visible helps by which their faith in a perpetual Providence was preserved: and in their later times it would seem a still more fitting gift as a substitute for many of those helps then withdrawn, which might give them assurance that He who was the GOD of their fathers would be also the GOD of their children. But what was among the highest attainments of the Jew ought to be among the elementary assumptions of the Christian. Living after the coming of Him who was the central object and final aim of all the prophecies and promises of the elder Scripture, our duty lies very principally in the present, and our faith is most to be nourished by the remembrance of the past: and thus prophecy of any special kind—of mere events—is not needed, and would be perhaps only perplexing to us if bestowed. But such prophecy has not been bestowed: for there are no chronological prophecies in the New Testament, but those which were fulfilled in that generation, or at least shortly after came to pass. But what then is to be said of the twenty-fourth chapter of St. Matthew? It is answered, the whole of it has primary reference to, and is satisfied by its fulfilment in, the ending of the Divinely ordained dispensation of the Jews

by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the termination of the polity and nationality of the Jewish people: and whatever further reference there is in it to the end of all things, is only such as the greatest earthly doom must, or may, have to one which shall be greater still.

But the book of Revelation, what of that? It is replied, The interpretation of this portion of the Scriptures is yet so obscure that it cannot be adduced to prove or disprove the reasonable interpretation of any other portion; and whatever its true exposition may be, it is at present the duty of every one who values highly sound interpretation to take heed that its prophecies be not allowed to pervert our history, and that the waking daylight of the Gospels shall always be made to measure the dreamy splendours of its visions. There is scarcely any portion of Biblical study which presents us with more sadly profitable instruction than the history of the interpretation of this one book: and it ought not to be allowed to pass by our minds without leaving on them a profound impression of the utter insufficiency and essential unsoundness of the more popular views of prophecy, and of the absolute need there is for every student of Scripture to add patience to his piety and fairness to his zeal. How dogmatic have even the devoutest been, and how deceived, in their interpretation of this book.

And how singular the apparent success of particular portions of many a system which as a whole has been conspicuously unsound. And if so many diverse coincidences can have already been found, and yet be proved by time alone to be false, how can we be guaranteed that

other coincidences in the future may not be as striking and yet as delusive? Often indeed in past interpretations these coincidences have been attained by mere ingenuity in selecting, and unscrupulousness in perverting, certain facts of history, and neglecting whatever it was not found possible to include. But clearly no method can be satisfactory but that which preserves the perspective of history true, and which acknowledges for this great prophecy the same leading principles which prevail throughout all others that we can interpret of Holy Scripture. The very fundamental analogy derived from all that precedes it, would negative at once all notions that this book contains the anticipated history of the Christian Church to the end of all things, chronologically arranged: for, as it has been already said, and ought especially to be thought of, there are no such prophecies—especially none extending over millenniums—in Holy Scripture. All Old Testament prophecy ends with the coming of the Messiah, and was given for the sake of the age in which it was written primarily though not exclusively. There is nothing at all corresponding to that mode of proceeding which is oftenest supposed to characterise the book of Revelation—the giving of numerous prophecies which have no relation to the age in which they were delivered, and were not to be accomplished till ages and ages should pass away. They have all been given directly for the edification and consolation of contemporaries, and only indirectly for those of far-distant ages; and nothing but the false notion that the prophecies relating to the restoration of the Jews, given by the prophets of the captivity, remain yet to be accomplished, could have given any kind of countenance

or analogy to the notion that prophecies which were repeatedly announced when delivered to be of things shortly to come to pass, have either been gradually and only partially accomplished for eighteen centuries now, or are yet every one lying unaccomplished in the still distant future. Such notions, it is here supposed, will some day seem as strange to most as they do at this day to some: and it is only the deep respect which is due from every one alike to even the narrowest sincerity when it is allied with strenuous labour, and applied to the supposed illustration of the sacred records of our faith, that would warrant the passing by such injurious errors without some emphatic discouragement and rebuke.

The Book of Revelation will probably never now admit of a wholly luminous exposition, in consequence of the histories we have of the times to which it refers not corresponding to the magnified scale of its prophecies. But the direction in which it is most wise to seek for a solution of its enigmas is from that standing point which considers that it was written before the destruction of Jerusalem, to encourage those whose hearts were then failing them for fear of those things which were speedily coming upon the earth: that it is taken up primarily and principally with events with which its first readers only were immediately interested: that it displays a series of pictures, doubtfully chronological and perchance partly contemporaneous, of events all shortly to come to pass: that wherever it at all points to historical events in the distance, it foretells a similar destruction for Rome and its polity which it first foretells for Jerusalem and its polity: and that then, representing various forms of opposition and

apostasy which should arise, it sets forth the Gospel's complete triumph over all, until it finally points the strained and aching eye towards a period of indefinite victory and splendour, when there should be comparatively new heavens and a new earth in which there shall be a New Jerusalem—the mother of us all—and the light of truth shall increase until infinite day exclude the night, and the Son having put all His enemies under His feet, shall deliver up the kingdom unto the Father, and GOD shall be All in All.

XXXVI.

The problem of Heathenism.

Thus much of the Jews: but what of the Gentiles, it may be said? What part of the plan of Providence is Heathendom? what has Theology to say of this? And to such a question it is indeed most difficult to reply: but at the same time it is one which cannot be honestly evaded. This great realm of spiritual shadow forms now, and ever has formed, by very far the largest portion of the whole inheritance of man: and it is a necesary consequence of the distinctively Christian idea of GOD, that all His creatures participate in His providence: and therefore that which has thus constituted nearly all of the human race from the beginning until of late must (if one may so speak) have its position marked in the very ground-plan of GOD's government of earth. What definite portion of such plan it is, is at present undiscoverable by us. We have not Scriptural data enough to justify us in asserting anything concerning it dogmatically. But that this matter is essentially insoluble we have no reason to believe, and that

whenever solved it must be so consistently with, if not by means of, the principles of Revelation, it can be only infidelity, or at least Manichæanism, to doubt.

We cannot but assume that the history of the world is all of it within the Providence of GOD—that the Almighty Will rules the whole: and if we do so, we can hardly avoid the consequence that all the histories of all peoples are essentially parts of one history—not wholly independent, nor nearly so much so as they seem to our finite and dull vision, but portions possibly of a living organisation larger than we can now comprehend—or at least so mutually related to each other that it can be only by our understanding its approximate place in the whole that we can at all judge rightly of any one. May we not then suppose, or rather must we not admit, that as the grace of GOD moulded Hebrew history, the Providence of GOD has moulded Heathen history? GOD careth for the beasts of the field, and for the fowls of the air, and therefore assuredly for all men. True, He has not entered into written covenants with all as He once did with the Jews, and has done also with Christians: but there are everlasting covenants sure without being written, which embrace every living soul that He has ever created, or ever will create. And when once we carry the idea of an omnipresent and impartial Providence into the midst of Pagan history, past or present, we seem obliged to recognise some elements of good in all the diverse civilisations of mankind: and we cannot but feel that if the true history of the Providence of GOD over humanity could be written from first to last, it would reveal a scheme which would as a whole be ac knowledged by us to be full of wisdom and of love, and

that therefore any portion of that history which may now be written which neglects to reveal some measure of these, has not been written truly.

And also in meditating on this obscure subject we should remember, that as little help can be expected to be given to us by the Old Testament in any speculations about the destiny of the Heathen, so also we need allow of but little hindrance from it. For of all nations the Jews were the least likely to present us with adequate views of the purposes of GOD towards the race of man, or to interpret for us any of the grand difficulties of the great history of the world. They hardly felt themselves to be of the same race with others: they had no sympathy with other peoples: all the rest of men were to them unclean, or as mere animals. They did not believe in their immortality, or that they lived under the Providence of the same GOD with themselves, or that they had, in fact, anything to do with their GOD but to be condemned and destroyed by Him. The dealings of GOD with the Heathen, this was a subject concerning which they had received no other ministry than one of condemnation. Their duty had never been other than to slay or to avoid them. This was a practical training which makes all Jewish notions on this matter uninstructive to us. The essential condition and peculiar virtue of the spiritual vision of the Jews was intensity and not extent. If it may be so said, they were Divinely constituted a near-sighted people spiritually. In order that they might see a few objects more clearly, their field of vision was more than ordinarily circumscribed: the admission of larger views would have apparently rendered them wholly unfitted for their specific mission in the world.

The extent to which this narrowness of view was indulged in, even under a wider intercourse with the world (from which they benefited much in other ways), may be seen in the writings of the Apocrypha. The world indeed to any Jew at any time of the old dispensation, or at the beginning of ours, must have been a conception very inadequate to the fact: but especially so in all the periods before their captivities, and subsequent large emigrations into Egypt. It was so even to the Greek and Roman, when compared with ourselves. And the very Apostle of the Gentiles — he who had more personal knowledge of heathenism, it may be, than any of his age—says that in his day the Gospel had been preached to every creature under heaven, which interpreted not literally but liberally, would yet seem to tell us that a complete statement even, much less a complete solution, of the problem of the significance of Heathenism was not within the sphere of the Revelation of the greatest of the Apostles. The addition of much more than another half of the world to our knowledge of mankind since then, may be intended to modify materially the views which GOD would have us now take of His government of His family on earth.

It is not, however, opposed to what is written in either Testament for our learning to assert, and it would seem very much for our edification to remember, That GOD is the GOD of the Heathen as well as of the Jews and of the Christians: That there is no respect of nations, any more than of persons, with Him, but that every person in every nation who fears Him and works righteousness is accepted of Him: and that as a man is not a Jew or a Christian in GOD'S sight who is one only outwardly, so also may he not

be a heathen who is one only outwardly. And it may not be inconsistent with the best interpretation of the spirit of the latest Revelation to suggest, Have there not been from the first, and are there not now, differences of dispensations contemporaneous? inner and outer circles of light, concentric and co-existing? And as we must not judge the Jew by the standard of the Christian, may it not be intended that we must not judge the Heathen by a standard approximating to either? And does not the Divine saying, that a man will be judged finally according to that which he hath, and not according to that which he hath not, allow us some considerable latitude in the interpretation of the letter of any law yet given us? Can we say accurately what the Heathen have? Inasmuch as a heathen is a legitimate subject for moral judgment at all, we must assume in him some consciousness of difference in kind between right and wrong—a sense of duty and of sin: and all history and experience teach us that, generally speaking, there is not wanting some idea of GOD as well, and a hope approximating to a faith in the indefinite future after death. That he should not have more spiritual knowledge than he has, may well seem strange: but though in a darkness compared with the Jew or the Christian which is visible enough, the heathen has yet his light: and may not any improvement of this small degree of privilege issue in the enjoyment of greater hereafter? Probably Yes — for CHRIST'S sake: for why may not the virtue of that Infinite Self-sacrifice extend further than the knowledge of it does? And if this be so, then may we also suppose that men may be now placed Providentially at various distances from the Sun of Righteousness according to their natural capa-

city for benefiting by its beams, and that they may be judged hereafter not according to their absolute approximation to the source of light, but according to the direction of their course, and the proportion of their progress towards it. And thus though there would still be great mysteries around the condition of Heathendom, yet these mysteries would be all mysteries of degree, and thus fall back into that mighty environment of cloud which is the inseparable consequence of the existence of evil, and we might yet be permitted hopefully to look forward to the future as gradually to reveal the solutions which we crave.

XXXVII.

Objections to the methods here proposed—their justification.

But how vague is this method of dealing with Scripture and Theology, and how this perpetual intrusion of an indefinite spirituality everywhere must of necessity introduce uncertainty into all doctrine, and by so doing gradually endanger and destroy men's faith in all dogmatic teaching, and ultimately maintain, if consistently pursued, that a man should trust to nothing but what his own investigations and private judgment may determine. The study of Theology is thus practically degraded from the lofty position which it has always hitherto been almost universally considered to hold, and while innumerable inlets are opened for the entrance of unsound doctrines and strange opinions into the sacred enclosure of the Christian creed, no new defences are erected, and no old positions are confirmed. Most natural objections are these, and deserving of patient consideration.

It certainly is quite true that the kind of Religion and

Theology which these pages would encourage, is that which rests very much more on the spirit than it does on the letter of the Bible: which makes progress one great aim of all moral and mental effort always, and therefore in Theology as elsewhere: and which has more sympathy with the needs of the present and the future than it has reverence for the mere dogmas of the past. No doubt these pages renounce all necessary obligation of traditional authority, and earnestly exhort men to self-cultivation in whatever relates to the comprehension of the creed which they profess. But also it should be noted that if, in some respects, they turn away men's dependence from human guides, it is always to fix that dependence upon One who is not only human, but also divine, and who is believed to be as willing as He is able to give wisdom always to them that seek it of Him. And even as far as human authority is concerned, these pages only maintain that such authority need not take precedence of conscientious conviction—but that it well may of mere self-will. Nothing would these pages blame more than ignorant self-reliance, or unfounded self-assertion. The sincere inquirer, indeed, has full emancipation here, but none besides: and how large a requirement this of sincerity is, few seem adequately to understand. And as to the vagueness of spiritual interpretations, let a man go and learn well what that means, which is written so repeatedly in various forms in the New Testament of CHRIST—The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of GOD—they are only spiritually discerned—but he that is spiritual judges all things.

And then, too, let us always bear it prominently in mind, that the whole process of GOD'S dealing with man, from

his first sin, is represented in that Revelation which we are seeking how to interpret aright, as grounded upon a substitution of the spirit for the letter. The Atonement of CHRIST is emphatically this. The literal punishment which is recorded as threatened is recorded also as not fulfilled: but the spirit of law is also represented as magnified by the very act of superseding its letter. Indeed no law that is not spiritual can justly assume to be permanent and universal. If the letter of law only were to be considered, laws must be innumerable, and yet never adequate. It is only by considering their spirit primarily that they can be made expansive and self-adjusting. Moral truth indeed is more frequently relative than absolute in its obligations: and there is oftenest the least practical justice in rules which are the most general, and in laws which are the most literal. Truly, the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life—this is the text on which all the truest Christian prophets have preached hitherto, and must and will preach more and more unto the end. To suppose that constant appeal to the spirit, and frequent subordination of the letter, is unsafe or unwise or unsound in any way, is what the New Testament would term a want of faith—a mark of a childish if not of a carnal mind. Did not our Lord trust largely to the essential vitality of His words in not ordering any book to be made of them, or ordaining any special priesthood to perpetuate them, or confining them to one inflexible form of expression? And have they not been found after many days, having been regenerating the world meanwhile? And His method of preserving His Church from the gates of hell, has it been by visible mechanical bulwarks, and not rather through impalpable influences

wholly—His Spirit touching men's minds, and opening their eyes, and strengthening their hearts, to receive His words, and to live upon them, and to die for them—here imparting unconquerable endurance, there infusing infectious zeal—enabling them to stand against all the assaults of their enemies and His, by arming them with the mere shield of faith and sword of the Spirit, and alluring them on to new conquests by unfolding to them new hopes, and unveiling to them new glories. And has it not been effectual? And the practical Christian life in the individual, is it not more the result of direct spiritual influence, than of any letter, or rule, or law? Is it not emphatically the product of a Divine power on the heart—of the operation of the HOLY GHOST—of a being born again of the Spirit? And is a knowledge of dogmatic truth equivalent to the love of Him who is the truth? Or is theoretic doubt the most general obstacle to growth in grace? Not so: The transforming power of the Gospel lies in an influence as real as the wind but as invisible and as indefinable —in a sympathy of man's spirit with the Spirit of CHRIST—by which the Gospel becomes to man not merely a new demand of duty but a new endowment of power, and a law which he can fulfil through love.

Doubtless there is a strong craving in the majority for a fixed, definite, ready-made Theology: and a Theology which is professedly fluctuating and expansive—which is problematical and progressive—always looking forwards to be purer and better than it is—is an aversion, and even an abomination to many. To many minds no creed is satisfying but one which is comprehensible and coherent—stable and manageable—strong as the mountain and clear

as the lake. But while the wants and the tastes of such as these are left unblamed, it is remembered that such wants and tastes can be abundantly supplied from out of the varied accumulations of the past: and also that there are others no less worthy of regard to whom such a Theology is a bondage intolerable, and who, feeling themselves neither able nor bound to bear it, are very resolutely determined to resist it. Freedom, progress, living development, adaptation to varying needs—these are for them essential in all such matters, and these they are equally determined at any price to achieve. They conceive of Christianity not chiefly as a truer Theology than was ever in the world before (though it is this among the many good things that it is), but as a more Divine life: a means of closer communion with GOD through love rather than through knowledge: not principally in fact a rule of faith, but a new principle of spiritual power affecting the entire being of man. They consider the central worth of the Gospel to lie not in its doctrines or its precepts, but in the Spirit and Person of CHRIST: they judge of all things according to a dynamical and not a merely mechanical measure; and believe nature and history, as well as Scripture, to be written for our learning. Believing that there is a certain measure of Divine influence vouchsafed to every period of man's history, and especially to every age of the Christian Church, they would mingle the revelations of the mind of Deity which come to us from His acts with those which come to us from His words, and would desire and strive that every period and every portion of the great family of CHRIST should express in its own modes its own experience, and be encouraged to pass down to its posterity some fresh contribution towards a higher

and deeper and more harmonious faith. Indeed they believe yet further, that as there is no blank in the Universe, so is there no pause in the Providence, of GOD; and that consequently there is no history of man altogether profane—none without some spiritual significance. And therefore in all expositions of the counsels of Infinite Wisdom they would exhort that we should ever regard the history of Providence as a commentary upon express Revelation—a commentary which ought to be read indeed with caution, and even with a careful scrutiny, but never without a large measure of docility and of reverence, and which, if so read, would often yield a light not elsewhere to be obtained, and a wisdom which would supersede much ordinary learning.

XXXVIII.

Requirements of the Christian ministry.

Such views require that the calling of the Christian teacher should be modified afresh in almost every successive generation. The knowledge of the needs of each must influence his teaching. Doubtless the duty of exhibiting the pure essential Gospel, faithfully and earnestly, abides ever: and to embrace this himself, and make its light shine through his life—this is the calling of every Christian, be he who he may, in every age. But the teachers of an age—the recognised instructors of multitudes—these must ever adapt their minds to the difficulties and necessities of the great body of men of their own generation: and all such will find themselves very uninfluential in our present world, if they will not converse with it on what it is interested in, as well as on what they are.

The calling of the Christian teacher, in fact, now and always is, to apply the principles and spirit of the Bible afresh to the wants and duties of each age as they arise: to consider it, and to consult it, as a living counsellor whose voice even in its whispers may be heard by the open ear: and to bring it to bear upon all the living interests of men. The Bible has lessons for all forms and stages of society as well as for all sorts and conditions of men, and these it is the duty of a true Christian prophet to extract and apply with a force ever new.

And in the more special region of Theology, his duty is not so much to instil the fixed dogmas of tradition, as it is to bring men to CHRIST, that remaining with Him they may find in Him their only real Master. To derive the essence of all our Theology from the study of the Mind of CHRIST—to take Him as the supreme standard by which we should measure our thoughts and words concerning GOD and human life and duty—to frame from out of the manifold evangelical representations of the Word of GOD an image in our own minds, which shall be so living and so speaking as to be to us ever as an influential monitor and judge—and then to compare always all our mere intellectual inferences and doctrinal deductions with this infallible criterion of spirit and of life—this is the disciple's duty equally and the teacher's. And for the teacher there is also the duty of bringing new things and old out of the rich treasury of Scripture—adapting and incorporating in his lessons, in order to enrich them and give them a more varied illustration and more ready access to various minds, whatever in the Elder Scriptures is in harmony with this; and disengaging in the New the mere rules and accommo-

dations of a temporary organisation from the everlasting and essential elements of evangelical truth and doctrine.

And for the double purpose of his own and his own disciples' more immediate edification, and his influence over the world at large, there is no study which will more amply repay his labour than that of Biblical exposition as distinguished from dogmatic Theology. The Bible of GOD and the history of man, these are the two highest subjects of human thought—the two noblest means of human culture—and they are inexhaustible. And these ought to engage, and will assuredly repay, all the attention which any earnest Christian can find it right to withdraw from works of spiritual charity and practical benevolence. So long as the spiritual, and even only physical, wants of our brethren remain nearly so great as they are—and we can foresee no time when they will be very much otherwise—and the opportunities for supplying those wants are so available—and we can foresee no time when they will be less so—so long will the chief duties of such an one lie in diffusing the elementary blessings of knowledge and of happiness which he himself has been already privileged to acquire or enjoy. But as no benevolent activity can be kept fresh and free from injury to the agent's spirit, which is not from time to time relieved by being interchanged with periods of thoughtfulness and study, it will ever be well for such an one to have some subjects of profitable mental exercise and refreshment. And Biblical studies, it is here said, will supply precisely the kind and variety of interest which he needs. To keep our minds and hearts ready to return to practical work, but at the same time relieved from its actual pressure, we must have subjects of

thought of a better and a purer character than those more commonly presented to us, and yet not so far removed from daily life as to have in them little moral application. The sciences strictly so called, however ennobling they may be in some special cases, will hardly serve the majority in this respect. Indeed perhaps so long as we know no more than we now do of life, the interest in those sciences as an intellectual excitement or a moral lesson will soon attain its limits, and begin to fade, and men will turn with new eagerness to speculations concerning those subjects which reduce even the highest celestial mechanics to comparative insignificance—the spiritual and social interests of humanity. And systematic Theology, this will not suffice: for in those metaphysical regions with which it is so involved there is no repose for any soul of man: and historic criticism has so superseded scholastic logic in the interest of our age, that many of the great things of theologians have grown small, and even whole systems have become as points, in its ever-widening horizon. But Biblical interpretation supplies all the varied attractions of classic scholarship—and even more, for it unites the east with the west—and carries a man into the whole history of the world; while it at the same time affords the highest possible refreshment for the student's individual soul, and gives him the deepest insight anywhere attainable into the spiritual life of the multitude. Let a man but bring to these studies a spirit of investigation open and intelligent and yet withal most reverent: equally candid and cautious: neither fearing nor courting novelty: endeavouring while inquiring most freely always to love and to worship still—and such an one will not be sent empty away.

And also it would be well to consider whether it would not be right that the ideal of humanity and the presentation of Godhead in CHRIST, as developed in the New Testament itself—apart from Theology—should not only be the primary study of every public teacher and of every private Christian, but also very often be from time to time the exclusive one. For the world and the Church both tend continually to colour or to dim that Divine vision which is there. A clear conception of the being of CHRIST —His whole Life on earth, from His Advent to His Ascension—this is the truest key to the mysteries of Christianity, and in proportion as a man is able to get this formed within him will be his superiority as a systematic interpreter of the whole Bible of GOD. The truest and purest and most influential religion is the product of the intellect, the conscience, and the affections, of men combined: and there is nothing that can so well unite these three into one as a devout contemplation of Him who has made the highest intuitions of the reason and commandments of duty and aspirations of the heart, visible realities in his own Person, and by making the Divine manifest in the flesh has, as it were, constituted at once an external conscience for mankind, and a vivifying centre of influence which can enable them to conform to it.

XXXIX.

Study of the history of Christian doctrine.

The history of Theology and of the Church, these too are most instructive studies for every man who would cultivate his Christian sympathies, and enlarge his comprehension of the effects of the Gospel in the world. In-

deed the differences of theological opinion which have existed among the best Christians in all ages, are facts which force themselves on the minds of the least thoughtful even, and that with an urgency and a frequency which compel consideration, and sometimes produce much sadness. With many it never ceases to be a wonder and an offence that pious persons should be permitted to make such mistakes as they assuredly do in matters of Theology —that men apparently of most Christian aims and attainments should be so opposed to each other in their conceptions of Biblical revelations, and that even some of the best should be resting so much of their professed confidence on what seems to others wholly unable to support any confidence whatever. To all such it is here suggested that a wider study of the history of doctrines would relieve them of much of this disquiet; it would teach them gradually to perceive that for the most part the subjects of difference among Christians have been mere products of the intellect: that these subjects have been unduly magnified by Christians themselves, especially by mere theologians, and that really they are very inconsiderable when compared with those other subjects on which they have ever agreed: and then that common sympathies and aims, and a characteristic spirit should be looked for among Christians, rather than uniformity of opinion, and that these will assuredly be found exactly in the proportion in which men have been most Christian. The Christianity of the intellect—doctrine—must ever vary with individual powers and cultivation, and these are most variable qualities; but the Christianity of the heart—piety—is always the same in kind, and differs only

in degree, in every one who is born again of the Spirit. It is indeed but another name for likeness to CHRIST. And truly if we would only accept the saying—one of the most simple, but also one of the most significant in such matters as these—that a Christian is one who is like CHRIST, and one who is not like CHRIST is not a Christian —these suggestions would be almost self-evidently true.

But even if it be not accepted, let it well be considered that the HOLY SPIRIT is never spoken of in Scripture as primarily an intellectual influence: that the truth into which He was promised to guide men (or indeed truth wherever it is spoken of in Scripture), is not theoretic truth but moral: and that the way in which we observe that He ever has influenced men's minds has been by first influencing their spiritual natures—their motives, their dispositions, and their tastes. Doubtless the influence of the HOLY SPIRIT on the whole man is very great, and therefore is so intellectually as well as morally: but it must also be considered, that our notions about Theology and its importance are not those which belonged to those times when that influence was the most direct, and that such points as those embraced by the differences of the most Christian are never anywhere in Scripture asserted to be the subjects of the Spirit's revelation. It is a fact too which every day's experience brings before us, that a man's understanding remains apparently but little altered after the greatest possible change in his spiritual feelings and life: and though there be a promise that by doing the will of GOD a man shall come to know certainly whether what CHRIST has spoken is a revelation of the Divine or not, yet there is not any promise that such an one shall thereby be constituted

into an unerring interpreter of all within the circle of that which CHRIST has spoken of, or any true expositor at all of that which CHRIST has not spoken of particularly. The history of any portion of the Christian Church which we may be considered as knowing at all adequately, or the state of our own small contemporary society, will unquestionably certify to us that no apparent piety can be a guarantee for exemption from the most considerable infirmities of opinion.

And surely it would be well if we thus learned to consider that piety of life and theological ability are in a very great degree separable in the history and present condition of the best portions of CHRIST'S Church, and that therefore man may put asunder what GOD has not joined together: that the mental infirmities of characteristically pious persons in theological matters are no more inconsistent with GOD'S Providence over them, than their similar infirmities in secular matters, but that both alike are simply evidences and consequences of our whole nature being as yet in a low stage of the grand process of our education: for thus we might be enabled legitimately to enjoy the great gain of regarding many more of our brethren with feelings not only of pity but of love. And thus while compelled to dissent from some even of their most cherished modes of Biblical interpretation, or from their most favourite theological dogmas, we might preserve unimpaired all necessary respect, and even emulous admiration, for whatever in them relates to the interior life of Christians. For this—the one only thing really needful—we should then feel may grow continually, and indeed only can do so, by habits of prayer and practical well-doing, joined to that

ever-active faith in CHRIST and love of Him which constitute the very essence of Christian piety: while the more mature comprehension of the plan of GOD'S moral government may probably be only to be acquired by the addition to these of a superior thoughtfulness, and cultivation, and natural insight, permitted only to the few.

That there is, however, a close connection between faith and righteousness, in degree as well as in kind, let it not be for a moment doubted: and that it is a duty for every man to free himself from error to the utmost extent possible for him, let it be always strongly asserted. But among the many truths which there are in the Bible, and none of them without moral signification, there are degrees of importance: and in the attainment of the Christian character and in the growth of the Christian life, it is only here asserted, that theological dogmas which are mere inferences of human logic from Biblical premises are of much less practical importance in such matters than they have been, and are, very generally considered, and that in proportion as the degrees of importance are inverted or confused, practical mischief is produced. Doubtless many who have professed very exclusive dogmatic principles (and those erroneous) have exhibited very Christian lives: but in such cases the verbal is very often quite different from the cordial creed, and to all exclusiveness of theory, exceptions have been made as love required. But while this has been the case with many, with many also the sad facts of the present, as well as the records of the past, too amply testify, that wherever the interest and importance attached to erroneous peculiarities of doctrine have been conjoined with only an ordinary measure of the distinctively Christian spirit, they have soon

become predominant over the catholic verities and characteristic graces of the Gospel, and the result has ultimately become as unhappy as might have been feared.

XL.

Gradual and progressive development of Christian doctrine.

The study, however, of the history of Christian doctrine need not be only sad: it may be instructive, and even cheering. It would seem that it is only by the collision, and it may be conflict, of the minds of many men, and even of many generations, that the true Christian religion can get more and more freely developed. The riches which there are in the Gospel are so varied, as well as unsearchable, that they require to be subjected to various minds, before they can be duly discerned, and rightly exhibited: and it is therefore here recommended that the history of doctrines should be a special study for those who are anxious to attain to a maturely Christian mind. Such cannot but learn many lessons from observing how various have been the subjects of chief interest in various ages of the Church—how in the earliest age the chief controversies were about the nature of the Godhead and the existence of evil: how then came discussions concerning the person and dignity of CHRIST: then about the nature of man, of freewill and grace: then about matters ecclesiastical rather than theological, and then about those great ideas which are both, the Sacraments: and then how as the Church grew and spread in many nations, the legitimate conditions of the relations between the temporal and spiritual powers —the claims of a visible centre of unity and the establishment of an universal monarchy, and all that related to

organisation rather than to doctrine, came to be of predominant interest and importance. Then too such cannot but learn much from seeing how naturally, if not necessarily, came reaction from this in a revival of personal religion: and all the class of questions which are connected with Scriptural views of our individual relations with GOD in CHRIST, and the mode by which peace of conscience may be assured without any Mediator with the Father but the Son: and the consequent bold assertion and assumption of the right of private judgment. And then how there soon followed on this as a natural consequence a new era of which the characteristic condition was sectarianism, and the common energy, proselytism: and how as involved in these, and certainly to be evolved from them, were and are the rights of the many and the elevation of the great body of all Christian communities by free discussion and general education: and the spreading of the Gospel among all nations: and a consideration of the significance and the claims of heathenism. And these last are truly the great interests which lie before the Church of the present and of the future.

But to keep only to the past; an attentive mind might also further discriminate between the kinds of subjects which have interested most the differing Churches of the East and of the West respectively. The East for the most part speculated about the Divine essence and attributes: the West endeavoured to determine man's nature and capabilities: the one was principally conversant with theories of the invisible, the other with the needs of humanity. Indeed while the gospel tarried among those Greek peoples to whom it was first chiefly delivered, it was treated primarily

as theoretic truth: and when it was transplanted into Roman territory, it became chiefly regarded as a polity and a scheme of discipline. Indeed it is most remarkable to observe how Rome did nothing for doctrine until after the first great Councils of the Church were closed: how in fact, so long as the East was dominant, doctrine was so magnified as to make Christianity almost all creed, but as soon as Rome became ascendant government was so magnified, as to make Christianity a Law rather than a Gospel.

Among many other lessons too which the study of the history of doctrine might teach us, it might tend to make us more tolerant of incidental errors, and more attached to fundamental truths: it would enable us to distinguish the permanent from the transient, and rightly to appraise the value of various truths; to understand the symbols of the various historical churches; and it would strengthen our confidence in the ultimate prevalence of the better over the worse. Truly all the discussions which have gone on concerning Christian truth during these long ages which a survey of ecclesiastical and theological controversies embraces, have not been only a beating of the air—a threshing of straw. There has been a true dominion gained over error—a sifting and harvesting of wheat; progress and purification, and not only agitation—growth superior to fluctuation and decay.

Those especially who are most troubled by the diversities of opinions in their own age, might by such study deliver themselves from the dread of doctrines which profess to be new, or are generally supposed to be so, by learning from it that there is scarcely anything of a theological or ecclesiastical kind which has not been put forth before, and from

out of which good of some kind has not been extracted and assimilated by some portion of the Christian Church; and that indeed so much is this the case that there would almost seem a cycle of recurrence for certain opinions: and that whenever such opinions do repeatedly appear it may be taken as an index pointing to some truth which is not yet sufficiently recognised and incorporated into that mass of thought and feeling on which and by which these modern ages ought to live. And as a consequence of seeing how so many various phases of Christian truth have been at divers times presented to the Christian Church, it may well teach us all to think little of our own small fancied discoveries of truth, for that others long ago, and with far less it may be of opportunity and of privilege, have found and held the like: and to be gentle also towards others who are earnest about the assertion of something positive which they hold as a part of Divine truth, though we cannot see it to be such, for that it has oftenest happened that such parties have not been all wrong, but that the Church has been ultimately improved by the full discussion of the subjects to which they have given rise.

Such study would specially also tend to show how local and partial causes—systems of philosophy, and the genius of races, and diversities of institutions—have ever exerted, and have ever a tendency to exert, unavoidable influences upon the development of Christian doctrine, and that allowance must always be made for these in our estimates either of creeds or of persons. And finally it would impress upon us the reality of the existence of different classes of minds which have a variety of needs all of which no one unchangeable form of doctrine will ever satisfy. Indeed

we may say that as the numerous and different sects formed chiefly on the ground of peculiarities of discipline, contain within them very fine specimens of the Christian life and spirit, and are thus witnesses that the Gospel as a means of education and worship is not set forth fully by any one church, or in any one form: so the history of the great doctrinal controversies, and the schools to which they have given birth—all nourishing grand Christian souls who have become the Saints and Doctors of their various churches—shows us that various races and long periods—even all human history—may be needed to exhibit fully the riches of knowledge and of wisdom which are hid in the Gospel of CHRIST. The fact probably is, that the progressive unfolding of Scriptural wisdom is a providential purpose carried on on a wider plan than we yet can comprehend, and that the Spirit of GOD communes afresh with the soul of every age and of every church, and thus gives to each a wisdom of its own, and through these to the Church at large a guidance ever new.

But it must be added, that though in certain directions, and with regard to many points of detail, history shows us that Christian doctrine has been hitherto a growth, and we have no reason whatever to conclude that this growth is yet perfected, yet with regard to many portions of the domain of Theology, history also shows us that so long as the data of speculation are not greatly multiplied, the same combinations of ideas, and the same kind of discussions, will be again and again reproduced, and little progress made, it may be, until the end. Such questions will never be solved: they will die away more probably from mere exhaustion of interest on the part of men whose energies

will be more and more absorbed by the more practical questions of the future, or from their deeper conviction —a conviction which every renewed discussion must strengthen—that such questions are without the range of any faculties of man. Many of the questions of other ages —questions which drove the subtlest of their doctors almost distracted—have already so died out for us: and in the humbler region of the controversies which have been most earnestly carried on among ourselves in our time, these controversies, it is believed, are being felt by most to be already wearisome, and our children, warned by the weaknesses of their fathers as well as of their forefathers, will probably not repeat their errors.

XLI.

The dealing of Christianity with the evils existing in the world.

If such suggestions were admitted and borne in mind the history of Christianity—both as Church and doctrine—might be relieved of some of that oppressive weight which otherwise it can scarcely fail to lay upon us in consequence of its mingled character of good and evil—of its early-rising and widely-spreading corruptions. It would then be remembered that Christianity did not clear a stage for itself, and begin to people it all afresh with new beings living wholly by its laws; nor did it confer on men a complete code of law for the new creation which it was—neither a theory nor a creed explicitly. It came among men tranquilly, dealing with them as they were, and acting only gradually upon them: taking up into itself at first something of their modes of thought, and condescending to express its peculiar revelations under the forms which they most readily could

understand: not making all old things suddenly to pass away, nor all things as suddenly to become new, but only supplanting error by propagating truth. Truly the Gospel of CHRIST was no new Theocratic polity, let down from heaven to earth full-formed, as the Mosaic Law was: nor was it a celestial philosophy containing ready-made solutions for all possible moral and intellectual difficulties, and systematising for us once for all the great kingdoms of nature and of grace: but it was the scattering of new truths respecting the vital relations of GOD and man, which contained such a spirit of life in themselves as should germinate for ever afresh in the hearts of men, and should suppress by supplanting the old growths of bitterness and of sin: the diffusion of a new spirit among men which should elevate and enlighten their minds by purifying and expanding their hearts —which should emancipate them from the slavery of sin by introducing them into the liberty of love—which should attract by blessing them, and conquer only by converting them. Viewed as a new element of fermentation infused into a corrupt mass—as new seed inserted into an old and variously compounded soil, almost all of which was already rank with weeds, and not any of it duly prepared—and then the good and the bad allowed to grow together and to re-sow themselves until the good should overgrow the bad—viewed thus, many of the difficulties, both negative and positive, which the history of Christianity presents are at least shifted back from details to principles, and will be found if pursued ultimately to retreat into that dark void where none can follow—the mystery of the existence of evil in the government of the All-Good.

In order to judge rightly, then, of the significance and

worth of the Church of CHRIST at any particular period of its history, we must bear these things in mind, and judge of it not absolutely, but relatively to the previously existing state of the world with which it came into contact—its differing influences of race, and its enormities of faith and life. Verily the formation of a Christendom—our present Christendom—has been a work which, were it thought of much, might be seen to be so grand and complex as very probably to embrace within the catalogue of its blessings events which at first sight would appear to present the character of inevitable evils. It is certainly in a very great measure by underrating or overlooking the inferior state of the general society in those races which it suddenly brought into subjection and incorporated with itself, and by counting its nominal conquests as parts of its real kingdom, that the history of the Church appears so sad. But on the first and worst aspect of the Church in every age of its existence, it would be difficult to point out any institution in the heathen world, either before Christianity or during its era, which has ever been in the least degree comparable with the Church, in respect of the ameliorating influences which it has introduced and cherished in the world. How it tamed and civilised, if it did not thoroughly Christianise, the old savage hordes of Europe: how it even regenerated its worn-out races: how it educed and employed the gifts and graces of all sorts and conditions of men: how it honoured the poor, abolished slavery and serfdom, and everywhere upheld right against force—it would be indeed well for those to ponder on patiently who are depressed by considerations of the ecclesiastical evils of the past. Truly the mere external history of the

Christian Church—saddened as it is with the most fearful sins—when compared with that of any institution, or society, or empire, which the world has ever elsewhere seen, has been the most wonderful, the most beneficent, and the most victorious. It can shew specimens of conquest over every kind of mental and moral and social estate—the highest individual intellect and the lowest civil organisation. It has been tried in a thousand balances, and whenever fairly weighed, has never in any been found wholly wanting. It has left wherever it has prevailed a deeper impression for good in legislation and jurisprudence —has given rise to a profounder morality and a purer sentiment—has breathed a nobler spirit into art and literature—and has stimulated to more disinterested and successful efforts and enterprises of philanthropy—than any other influence whatsoever that has ever been at work among mankind.

And it is very much from forgetting some of these peculiarities, of its early position more especially, that its history has been judged of so hardly. That which has probably produced the greatest amount of error in this respect has been the tacit assumption, that multitudes have been really converted to CHRIST when they have been nominally so to Christianity. It is to be feared that a desire to make the progress of Christianity appear almost miraculous at some periods, has left the injurious impression that at other periods it was something less than natural. But the true perception of CHRIST'S providence over His Church is probably that which sees it to be less fitful and more gradual than at first sight it seems. Doubtless that was a grand epoch, and era, in its history when Chris-

tianity was recognised by the Roman Emperor and Empire; but it was so rather in consequence of the withdrawing forever henceforth of external obstacles than from the bestowment of any new power: it really altered nothing essentially in the condition of the Church: it chiefly recognised that which was existing already, and perhaps even introduced as many elements of corruption into its constitution as it conferred upon it new opportunities of influence. And so with regard to the nominal conversion of the barbarous tribes which subsequently overran Roman Europe—it is a mere delusion, and false use of terms, to class this in the mass with that kind of conversion of which the New Testament speaks so much in its histories of the earliest Churches. For the most part it was but an outward change, or at best one of creed and of morality and of manners, rather than of the natural into the spiritual, or of the earthly into any new creation.

And also in estimating the efficacy of the Church in the world, we certainly ought to extend our views over the whole region which it occupies, and not merely over the European portion of Christendom. We ought to study the amount of substantially Christian influence which has resided, and even now may lie latent, in the Churches of the East as well as of the West. The great Greek Church, for instance, which is so often forgotten, and so little studied in comparison of the magnitude of the region, both of history and of geography, which it occupies—how many souls may it have nourished with food more convenient for them than that which it supplanted—the heavenly bread and water mixed, it is to be feared, almost from the first with many deleterious elements, but yet, it may be, with the

healthful more than neutralising the poisonous. For be it remembered, it has ever taught men to worship CHRIST as GOD, and to come to the Father through the Son. It has never denied any great cardinal truth of the Apostolic Creed: but CHRIST crucified and CHRIST risen—the HOLY SPIRIT'S gifts and graces—have ever been spoken much of amid its myriads of ministers and of members: and we may therefore surely be allowed the consoling thought that there may have been, and may be, many souls purified by its faith, and nourished somewhat, if not to maturity, under its semi-christian discipline.

XLII.

Constitution of the Roman Church.

The Roman Church, however, is that which doubtless has ever occupied the largest space in the history of Christianity, and at this moment possesses a dominion on the earth greater than that of all other Churches put together. And truly its present condition is fearfully below the needs of any portion of Christendom. But its long history is not all dark: it bears on it many marks of GOD'S providence. It was the chief conservator of Christianity for fifteen centuries, and its present extension from Rome to Pekin, and from the Alps to the Andes, bespeaks a dignity which it can be only a want of wisdom or of fairness to ignore or to despise. It has been the largest agent in the civilisation of the world, and given birth and education to many of the noblest and most cultivated minds which the world has ever seen: and it has uniformly from the first exhibited to a greater degree than elsewhere can be seen, a realisation of the idea of a visible Kingdom of CHRIST amid the king-

doms of this world. And with all its awful deviations from the purity of Christian doctrine, and its still more awful derelictions of Christian duty, it has yet ever witnessed to the cardinal fact of the Christian creed, with a clear and consistent, an unfaltering and continuous, testimony. It has ever held up CHRIST to the view of its members, so conspicuously and so influentially as to generate in the great majority of them in all ages, an affectionate adoration of Him, and an active gratitude towards Him, such as well may be a lesson to the maturest professors of the purest faith.

The sad errors and sins, abuses and deformities of the Roman Church must be so obvious to every eye that these pages could attract or detain, that it is wholly unnecessary to dwell upon them here, save as they are inextricably involved with some of those characteristics of its position which it is wished now to point out. The real strength of the Roman Church has ever lain, and lies now, in the grandeur of its assumptions: in its making its demands and its provisions so immense—even equal in extent to the great faith and need of humanity. Not chiefly in its polity or its policy does its strength lie—though both of these are doubtless very chief secondary sources of its power; the transcendent character of its claims—its being not a Philosophy, nor a Morality merely or chiefly, nor even a Creed, but emphatically a Religion—a system of worship—a discipline of devout obedience to an unseen ever-living Will—herein lies its strength. Nothing indeed can be well conceived more grand, and coherent, and complete, than are the pretensions of the Church of Rome. It has built itself up on the assumption that Christianity

and itself are synonymous: that GOD is now in covenant with it, and with it alone, through CHRIST, and regenerates and saves human souls only through the means of communion with it. It considers itself in possession of all, and the only, means of grace on earth: of the exclusive presence and promise of CHRIST: of all authentic traditional Scripture and unscriptural tradition, and of a perpetual inspiration as a living interpreter of all the needs of humanity and of all the truth of GOD. And it assumes to be unchangeable as well as infallible: an immortal body which has been and is and ever will be inhabited by one mind—a mind which has always thought and felt the same on every subject in every age—a mind which has contained within it all truth potentially from the first, and has expressed, and will express, all necessary truth from time to time—and which though developing itself continually, can only grow and never decay. A priestly caste endowed with essentially supernatural and exclusive gifts, and a supreme authority in matters both of faith and practice, at all times applicable to the conscience of the individual—these are of the very essence of the Church of Rome, and constitute it a consistent and coherent whole, universally and unchangeably one. Thus the Roman Church on its own assumptions is fully furnished for universal rule, and is a complete Theocracy—more complete even than Judaism: for it varies and develops its law infallibly according to the needs of the ages, while the Jewish law, though infallible was inflexible.

And these claims address themselves to portions of our nature, and are accompanied with a complicated organisation of provisions, which secure for them a strong hold in

all ages on the allegiance of men. The Roman Church is indeed the most skilful conceivable adaptation of immense spiritual powers to the natural weaknesses of humanity—at once confirming those weaknesses and its own strength, while at the same time it largely satisfies and ennobles some portions of man's better mind. And all its means of influence and modes of worship are of this semi-spiritual, semi-sensual, kind : an elaborate endeavour to infuse religion into man from without, as well as to develop it from within, and to make the special objects of faith the objects also of sight.

And then in its assumption not only of privilege but also of power—in its pretended prerogative of excommunication —in its anathema—what strength lies here. To any one and every one who looks for salvation as much through a Church as through CHRIST—what an attractive spell is there in these otherwise repulsive words,—The Church of CHRIST is one, and we are it, and out of it there is no salvation. Fearfully fascinating to the credulous, or even to the doubting, is this assertion : for thus the Church of Rome claims now to be to the world—ever threatened with another deluge of Divine wrath—as the Ark of GOD of old : for all within it, safety arbitrary but assured : but for all without it—if they be not sometime taken in—sooner or later sure destruction, as none may hope by their own strength to outlive such a flood.

Relative positions of the Roman and Protestant Churches.

XLIII.

Any notion, then, of the re-union of the Roman and the Protestant Churches is on the very face of it wholly idle.

They are in claim and in spirit so diverse as to be essentially irreconcileable. Members of each may fraternise, but the Churches must ever remain emphatically hostile. For though it cannot be said that any who come unto God only through CHRIST are otherwise than of the same religion —yet the conceptions of the necessary historical development of Christianity in the case of these Churches is so fundamentally different, that their incorporation into one consistent co-operative body is wholly impossible. The points indeed on which they agree are of such indefinitely great importance that they may well be conceived as more than counterbalancing in the maturest mind the very important points in which they differ; and thus all Churches, holding the head, may be rightly viewed as simply more or less corrupt members of the great body of CHRIST: but still these points of difference are such as directly affect the province of action, inasmuch as they relate to the modes, though not to the central object, of worship, and to the means, though not to the essential nature, of grace. The one great difference between the Roman and the Protestant Churches may be said to lie in the assumption by the one, and the rejection by the other, of the idea of an exclusive or mediatorial Priesthood. Their practical abuses, or even theological errors, might very reasonably not be considered as a perpetual barrier of separation. The indefinite influence of modern culture might gradually diminish these, until the lines of demarcation grew so faint as to admit on both sides of substantial union without unworthy compromise. But the immensity of Roman claims, and their exclusiveness, in the great matter of the Priesthood, conjoined with that other fundamental claim of infallibility

which stereotypes all the errors of the past, would render any concession on the part of the Church of Rome equivalent to an act of self-destruction—as much as partnership ever is of monopoly. Such claims as these are not matters of degree. And the Roman Church ever considers them not to be so. Those who have been at Rome will know that at that proud centre of Catholic dominion no Church but one is recognised. Any Protestant collection of Christians is not there named a Church: and it is there considered that though societies and associations of persons who profess and call themselves Christians may have many merits individually and socially, and many indirect privileges reflected upon them by their co-existence with the Catholic Church, yet as far as the covenanted blessings of the Gospel are concerned, and its peculiar gifts of grace, all such are wholly without them, and, so far as eternal salvation is concerned, only probably further removed in spirit from it in proportion to their outward approximation to the Church's means of grace. For those whom an invincible ignorance, as they term it, has deprived of the possibility of union with itself, there may be hope; but with regard to those who have known the (Roman) Church, and have not entered it, there is none. Thus while to the Protestant the assumptions of the Church of Rome seem so unjust as to be profane, and its worship so sensuous as to be idolatrous, to the Roman Christian the little faith of Protestants seems as infidelity, and their practical position as something worse than heathenism.

But strong as the Church of Rome may seem to itself and to many others to be, and invincible and victorious as it has been for so many centuries of the past, its cause is

hopeless—its fall is certain. It may stand indeed long yet, and it may spread for a while: for it has on its side indefinitely large forces of fear and of interest, of error and of prescription, to work with, and all the superstition of mankind to work upon. But after all the Roman Church lives only on the unreasonable and unscriptural faith of men: and as men become more reasonable and more scriptural in their faith—which if Christianity be true must be part of the ordained progress of the race—the Roman Church must gradually fail and ultimately fall. It has even now the greater part of modern life and modern thought against it: science and scholarship and learning, and the New Testament, and Protestantism, and GOD'S Providence: and these are adversaries which it is impossible for any institution to hold out against for ever, or for long. And there is no new element of strength discernible in its cause in these later ages which should even give it a revival: and though singular conversions to it may from time to time take place, there is no system or prospect of any that will materially affect its destiny, or ours. But at the same time it may be added that the downfall of the Church of Rome will probably be rather through decline and decay than through convulsion. It will not be so much overthrown as deserted: it will not be slain, but it will die.

XLIV.

Central principles of Protestantism.

Truly the grand schisms in the Church in the sixteenth century were events which proclaimed at once the advent of a new era of man's history, and the irrevocable doom of the old one. They cannot well be looked upon with too

much of interest, or as of too much importance: they must be considered as either the best or the worst events which have happened in Christendom. If the European and English Reformations were not substantially justifiable, and may not be considered as essentially good—however accidentally evil—then indeed there is but one ecclesiastical refuge, or none, for a religious soul on earth. But it becomes more and more difficult, as the history of the world develops itself, to pronounce against the Protestant Reformations, or to suppose that so grand a schism—for all are one in principle—as that which now comprehends within it many tens of millions of men, and these among the foremost nations of the earth—can have been, and be still, a mere evil accident in the Church's history, or something which is to be met only with anathema and hate. But then if these disruptions of Christendom may be looked upon as providential reformations, or in their general principles and consequences as in substantial accordance with the aim of the Gospel of CHRIST—as events not to be regretted or apologised for, but to be admired and rejoiced in—then must they also be regarded as the most important events and epochs in the history of religion and of modern civilisation, and introductions to a quite new era in the life of man on earth. If it be once admitted that they were characteristically good, and only accidentally evil, then their importance cannot be exaggerated. For they in such case must stand forth to all time as sufficient vindications of the rights of conscientious dissent from all mere authority and rule, ecclesiastical and other, in matters of faith: they must be considered as declaring unequivocally that GOD'S plan of

moral government includes a great scheme of progress: and there can be no pure product of reason and of conscience—whether in the case of societies or individuals —which they will not serve to justify and to glorify. Henceforth any other limitations of human freedom in matters of religion but such as are imposed by a sense of individual responsibility to an Invisible Lord, are arbitrary: and must ever be also unjust when they are attempted to be enforced by any other influences than those of moral persuasion. The acknowledgment of the sacredness of the individual conscience—this is one of the great births of Protestant time: and how much is included in this, and how unspeakable a gain it is, we should do well thoughtfully and frequently to consider. Indeed one might say that the characteristics of Protestantism lie rather in the maintenance of this spirit of freedom, than in the profession of any definite peculiarities either doctrinal or ecclesiastical. Protestantism is no visible unity at all: no one creed, and no one Church. The root of Protestantism lies in the recognition of individual responsibility, and of the duty and the right of free thought and speech in matters of religion, and in the denial and rejection of all pretensions of human mediation between man and GOD. It acknowledges indeed one ultimate and supreme standard of truth in the Bible, but confessing that there is no infallible interpreter of this on earth, or any necessarily more true for the individual than his own reason and conscience, enlightened by the HOLY SPIRIT, it can make none but arbitrary distinctions between any opinions which may be professedly derived from this one source, and compared with this one standard. A Protestant cannot justly term any man a heretic (in the old

ecclesiastical sense of the word) who professes to derive his religious belief only from the Scriptures, however erroneous he may consider those opinions to be, or however much they may differ from the opinions of the majority of Protestants. For his own position in Christendom forbids him to acknowledge numbers to be a test of truth: as he himself has rejected the verdict of a far greater majority than those can oppose who reject the opinions which he adopts.

And so with regard to the Protestant Churches: they all have this in common, however much each may have besides which is peculiar to itself, that they are voluntary societies —communities which acknowledge no human authority in matters of faith or of discipline, but such as they have either created or may change. A Protestant Church is essentially but a congregation of Christians who agree nearly enough in their interpretation of the Bible to worship together: and the limits of difference which may justify Protestants in separating into various groups of worshippers are indefinite and varying, and can be judged of justly in many cases only by the individual and by GOD. And thus as a consequence of its own position of freedom, a Protestant Church cannot consistently be persecuting: it is debarred from persecution by the very golden rule of its religion, not to do unto others what it would not have others to do unto it. And it stands by toleration. By those who believe in any exclusive means of salvation, and that they are infallibly in possession of it, persecution so far as it may be regarded as a means of putting others into possession of the same, may reasonably be considered as a duty, and even as a charity: for the salvation of the soul may well be deemed as cheaply purchased by any sufferings

of the body. But a Protestant Church disclaims all notion of the existence of any infallibility anywhere on earth, and what it calls the truth can therefore be but the testimony of a certain number of minds, which are nearly enough consentient in their judgments concerning their creed to worship together, that such is what they find to be the nearest approximation to the absolutely pure, but which after all lacks any Divine ratification. No Church therefore can justly do more than earnestly state its own convictions, and the reasons on which they are grounded, and affectionately persuade others to adopt them. Persuasion—the sword of the mouth—is the only legitimate weapon of Protestant warfare. To propagate one's own deliberate and conscientious opinions is indeed an obligation on us of the great Gospel Law of Charity: but to use any other than moral means in doing so, is for Protestants not only a breach of that law, but of the yet more ancient law of justice, and at once a crime and a contradiction, a folly and a sin.

XLV.

The principles of Protestantism constructive as well as destructive.

But Protestantism is not merely negative, and toleration is no synonym for indifference. Protestantism in its first large modern manifestation may have seemed to be more negative than positive, but it really was not wholly so then, and is not so now—as its subsequent history and present condition have shown abundantly. If it has destroyed much it has also created much, and is now sustaining much. A new order of society has sprung from it, and all that is most active and productive now in Christendom is

Protestant. In the Roman Church, when Protestantism arose, and even unto this day, there were and are positive truths of the Gospel, and large needs of our nature, unexpressed and unprovided for; and so long as they remained unrecognised and unsupplied the education of humanity was obstructed. And Protestantism is very largely an acknowledgment of these neglected regions of culture, and an attempt to occupy them: and its destructive tendencies are only a preparatory stripping off those bandages on Christianity and the Church which render the growth of these latent principles almost impossible. Unquestionably there is a large portion of Protestantism which has been and is merely destructive: and considering what accumulations of worse than worthless traditions there were and are in the great Churches of Christendom, it may well have hitherto been that, and been a blessing too: but at the same time this is not all that Protestantism is, or professes to be. It builds up as well as pulls down, and deposits new seed in the soil which it clears. It doubtless magnifies much intellectual freedom, but it considers it of value as a means, rather than of worth as an end: and while it upholds inquiry, it does not honour only doubt. Mere unlimited discussion and debate—this it does not consider good in itself, but simply as a condition of progress towards something else, which something else must be the measure of the worth of Protestantism. Indeed one might say that nothing honours faith so much as Protestantism does: the worth of faith is the very cardinal article of its teaching: but its faith is not in man but in the invisible. Verily it is only faith which can ever be fruitful of new organisations, or of any influences which can long have hold of the hearts

of myriads. A man's mere disbelief is to him loss of power, both personally and over the hearts of others: and in proportion as it makes a man abandon the territory which his soul once occupied without that territory being fresh peopled with other agencies, or new territory being discovered, barrenness and inertness will overspread his whole moral nature: but where persuasion of new truth supplants the perception of the old falsehood, there something will be constructed which will be better than that which is destroyed, and the whole spiritual being of man will feel itself renewed in proportion as it is changed.

It certainly is not that as Protestants we should necessarily like discussion or disunion for their own sake, or prefer discord to concord, all other things being equal: but only that we do prefer separation to union, all other things being so unequal. Nor is it that the results of variety of opinion and organisation, or the jealousies of ecclesiastical and other spiritual rivalries, are supposed to be good in themselves or as a final state, but only and simply that they are at present in a state to be accepted with hopefulness as a temporary and transitional one, and as probably the highest condition as yet attainable. Protestantism is indeed, as it has been said, a principle rather than a system: a principle of progress and purification: and no Church existing on the earth is yet so far advanced in the realisation of pure Christianity, as not to need to be in some measure Protestant. All the Churches which have yet recognised this principle as legitimate have failed to carry it out to its consistent results. No Church yet comprehends all the truth revealed, or excludes all the error forbidden, in the Gospel: and therefore as a necessary consequence of

one of the doctrines common to most Protestant Churches —the sinfulness and darkness of human nature—the commotion of controversy and the agitation of the better against the worse, are necessary and healthful for it, until the Spirit of GOD shall have so transformed the Church as to have made it meet for a more heavenly inheritance.

However, it cannot anywhere be concealed, and it is here wished that it should be very emphatically asserted, that the difficulties introduced by Protestantism are great, both in the case of churches and of individuals. Protestantism teaching that there is no infallible guide for man on earth, nor any ultimate judge and interpreter of truth —no Church which is exclusively Divine, nor any which is other than a mere approximation to the best—and that though there be thus nothing visible on which man can lean, the worth of the individual soul is infinite, and depends upon the acceptance of the highest truth revealed to it—does doubtless place man in an awful position—a position requiring even supernatural strength to stand in consciously and steadily for long. It cannot be too much thought of, that he who has dared to dissent from Rome has done a deed which involves him in consequences which he can never get rid of. He has come out from the only visible shelter in Christendom into the wide open plain, and henceforth for him there is nothing over him but the infinite heavens. And it is to teach a man that he may be safest thus—that he may stand before GOD by faith in Him alone, if only he come to Him through CHRIST and through none else—this it is which is at once the aim and the worth of Protestantism. Doubtless it is a fearful position, as it has been said, but it is one as full of dignity as it

is of danger, and one which cannot be abdicated without degradation. If we would not be subjects of Rome there is no other condition possible for us, sooner or later; there is none which can be permanently safe for us, because there is no other which is consistent or which is true. The Protestant, let it be repeated, can only stand by faith in the invisible : a standing-place which must ever seem to some, and to many sometimes, so difficult as to be impossible to be held for long : and it is by this peculiarity of not trusting implicitly to any human mediation between the individual soul and GOD, and denying the existence of any ultimate tribunal on earth—that Protestantism is separated from Romanism more than by any differences of creed or of polity. Doubtless those differences which have been so often pointed out between Romanism and Protestantism are true, namely these : That while Romanism (like Paganism and Judaism) makes religion consist chiefly in worship and in rites and in all manner of vicarious functions—sacerdotal and sacrificial — in self-consuming austerities, and definite remissions of sins, and everywhere subordinates the inward to the outward, and the individual to the body—Protestantism makes religion consist in faith and private prayer, and personal appropriation of truth, and constant responsibility to conscience—considering chiefly the edification of the individual, and developing religion from within a man by the presentation of the written word and brotherly communion, and common worship with frequent preaching—excluding all that is merely vicarious, and encouraging chiefly those kinds of self-discipline which are denials of self for our brethren's sake. These things are true, and ought to be much dwelt upon : but still these are

things which are but differences of degree, and might be made to approach so near to each other by diminution on the one side and increase on the other, that they hardly would serve as a permanent line of demarcation. That which really does so is, as it has been said, the utter rejection on the part of Protestants of any priestly caste in the Christian Church, and of any necessarily binding tribunal on earth superior to the conscientious decisions of private judgment.

XLVI.

Possibilities of Christian union.

It is only on the base of a perfected Protestantism—which includes as among its chiefest products a complete toleration—that a really Christian union—a truly Catholic Christendom — can be hoped for. The toleration and union, however, here spoken of are not to be confused with a mere indifference to differences of religious opinion and worship, or with a slurring over and ignoring the deliberate convictions or sentiments of any considerable bodies of Christians: not at all this: but rather have their grounds in a profound feeling of the identity of the Christian spirit under very various forms, and of the essential worth of it under any form. It will certainly be found true that he who has most faith in the power of the Christian spirit will be the most tolerant of its most varied exhibition, and he who has the least will be the least tolerant of any deviation from his own form. Spiritual cowardice like all other cowardice is cruel, and therefore persecuting: while true magnanimity, in this region as in all others, is gentle and generous, and full of hope. His-

tory, however, has decided for us the case of mere outward toleration; and henceforth we cannot but be protected from all fearfulness of spiritual despotism, not only by the progress of civil liberty, but also by the mere competition of rival infallibilities.

And history, too, has abundantly proved that union will henceforth never be accomplished through authority, or through anathema. The attempts in this direction have been the scandal of the Church. In what way, then, are we to seek for unity? By comprehension and by love. Vague methods truly: but look at the most obvious aspect of the case. The various Churches of Christendom cannot extirpate each other by force, nor can any one so reduce all the others to subjection. What other than moral means then can suffice? And of these anathema will not answer, for this can have effect only where there is faith in its power to begin with—but this would be as difficult a thing to produce now as would be that union to which it is proposed to be a means. There are far too many refuges for the anathematised in our days to make exclusion from any particular privileges for opinion sake to be practically felt as retribution. If then we would not give up the hope of one Christendom, each Church must for some long while be content to develop its own modes of thought and worship to the limit of their capabilities, and then be sure that the more nearly the Churches approximate to their own ideal the more nearly also they will approximate to each other—and the more nearly also to that unity of spirit which will cease to regard their differences of form as any ground of separation.

The holding the same truth is indeed one very great bond

of union; but so is also the love of truth, and yet more the love of Him who is the Truth: and it is here only said that each Church or individual holding what truth they may have in love, and not in hate, will be the best means of their coming to hold more, and of bringing others to hold the same: and freedom from anathema in searching for truth may greatly promote the finding it—for more are now driven away from it by dogmatism that are led away from it by freedom. And also, the more men put off their individual prejudices and ignorances and enmities, and put on that same mind which was in CHRIST JESUS, the more must they become united to each other by the affinities of common worship, and by the influence of common hopes. These are the really converting and uniting powers among men: and as each man knows more of CHRIST, and feels more the unspeakable gift which He is to man, the more will he be ready to embrace as a brother every other man who knows and feels the like. And surely were this so, and in proportion as it is so, the prospects of substantial unity in Christendom would be brightened, and some hope might be entertained that the common love of Him who loved us all would constrain us, for His sake, to love each other more.

XLVII.

Protestantism implies progression.

And surely it would seem as if to Protestantism we must look for the guidance of the future history of our race. To individual faith and faithfulness—to the energies of conscience and the self-substantiating power of truth and right—GOD has apparently henceforth committed the

real history and progress of the world. Protestantism is the power which now most rules the modern world, having already given to those who have adopted it a principle of progression which all others will never be able successfully to oppose. And its prospects grow increasingly encouraging every generation. Its peculiar methods of warfare—those of argument and persuasion, and active beneficence—are receiving fresh auxiliaries continually. The great majority of the civilised world is becoming more and more open to such influences, and continually more affected by those means of enlightenment which a free intercourse and a still freer literature abundantly supply. And besides the existence of more numerous and powerful influences of the same kind with those which produced and furthered the Protestantism of past centuries, there have arisen, and are arising, new kinds of protests against ecclesiastical and other arbitrary dominions—protests recorded not merely in Confessions and Declarations, but in Institutions and Constitutions most difficult to be gainsaid. The Reformations of the sixteenth century have been confirmed by all the Revolutions since. And Science is Protestant, and Representative Government is Protestant: and these seem spreading among men irrevocably.

But Protestantism hitherto has been but an imperfect work—indeed in some respects one inconsistent as well as incomplete—a combination of discordant elements. It has destroyed a visible unity without establishing a perfect liberty: and it has too often enforced obedience to a fallible authority when it has professed to reject for itself all that claims to be infallible. In these things it must reform itself for the future, if it would be the agency to do

that mission which seems to lie before this age, and the ages that are to come. This mission includes the solution of theorems and of problems such as never harder have been submitted to man. The theorems which we have to conquer, or to be conquered by, are of this kind: to reconcile faith with knowledge, and religion with science: and so to separate more and more the essential spirit of Christianity from its form and letter, and adapt its principles to the mental modes of the present and the future, that all minds shall see in it something higher than themselves in proportion as they rise consciously in the scale of culture and of wisdom. And the problems which lie before us are of this kind; to apply Christianity to social as well as to individual life: to constitute its principles the foundation of civil laws and organisation: to realise it largely as a society as well as a doctrine: so to build up a kingdom of GOD on earth as to make Christianity a visible reality for this life as well as an indefinite hope for another. Great and difficult enterprises are these: but they are not beyond the power that lies latent in the Gospel to accomplish. We certainly ought not to conceal from ourselves that in all these regions there is yet very much territory to be possessed by us. More especially in the region of the practical is the present state of Christendom—even of that part of it which is most purely Protestant—most lamentable. The condition of the great multitudes even there is one of carnality and of obvious sin—so that really what we call Protestant countries—sad as it is to say it—are yet half Pagan. And in some of the higher portions of the same, where there is the purest creed and the freest means of development for the Christian

spirit, how little depth of religious feeling is there among the society to which it has given rise. For the most part, in proportion as that society has increased in a general observance of the morality of the Gospel, and has adopted in a vague way much of its benevolent and beneficent spirit, it has lost its hold on the great realities of the invisible, on the sense of the infinite everywhere, and on the recognition and appreciation of supernatural influences. One cannot help feeling that in these ages of light there is something missing which was characteristic of those darker ages, and which ought to be present in all ages that call themselves Christian. Men of old time were more moved than most are now by hopes and fears concerning the unseen—had more consciousness, as it would seem, of living under an Omnipresent Eye. Though the Christianity of our time is so much more diffused than of old, it would sometimes seem as if it were proportionally diluted; the souls of very few men being ever stirred into sustained excitement concerning interests wholly invisible. In our time how much more does life derive of its interest from terrestrial and mechanical elements than from spiritual: and how it seems to have lost that sense of retribution for sin which was the soul of a Theocracy, and the very substance of Paganism.

Verily no one can look with a discerning eye, or a sensitive heart, upon the present condition of even the highest forms of Christianity as existing in any large societies or organisations, without being exceedingly saddened at the sight. Individual specimens of Christian nobleness we may see here and there which are indeed refreshing to eye and heart: affording us fresh confirma-

tions of our faith, by making something of the future heaven visible on earth. But the nominally Christian multitudes of all Churches, these recur again and again to the mind, and warn us very emphatically and very frequently, that the enemies with which Christianity has to strive now as ever are many and are mighty, and that the victory lies yet in the distance, and can be won only with painfulness and weariness and hard struggle to the last.

XLVIII.

Present position of Christians.

But still though these things be so, and though undoubtedly compared with what might have been, and yet may be, the present condition of even the purest forms of social Christianity be so lamentable, yet historically viewed and not ideally, we may be warranted in saying that on the whole, in no other age of the past was nominal Christendom ever better than it is now—never in any so good. And if we permit ourselves to look, as surely we sometimes may, at the sphere of the indirect influences of the Gospel—at that large region which lives in its reflected light, without the organisation of any Church but within the confines of Christianity—we may see much to alleviate our sadness. For if there be much of the spirit of the world within the Church, there is also much of the spirit of the Gospel without it. There is assuredly a considerable territory enjoying a light much greater than was ever vouchsafed to the highest heathenism of old, lying without the positive institutions of any Church—reflected light, we have said, but still purifying and cheering. Christianity has given

birth to modern civilisation: and now that civilisation is doing much to sustain and extend the influence of its parent. For the object of the highest civilisation now is becoming ever more and more moral and spiritual, and uses that which is material but as its instrument—an instrument very powerful and not to be neglected, yet still but an instrument. Certainly we may do much for the soul through the body, though we may do so much more for the body through the soul. And material civilisation, however poor as an end, is, or may be, very valuable as a means. It may exercise, and through exercise may strengthen, all the faculties of man: by multiplying men's interests it may enlarge their sympathies, and by creating new calls of duty and arousing dormant energies and aspirations, may educate men's capacities for a higher order of being: and by the facilities of all kinds which it gives to interchange of thought and to personal intercourse with even very distant races, may be among the most powerful of all subsidiary agencies for sustaining the conquests of the past, and continually increasing, both the amount and the rate of man's moral progression.

And assuredly it has already been the instrument of quite immeasurable good. Its great achievements of freedom of worship and of speech—its recognition of the dignity and worth of the individual, so that there shall be but one law for all, and that law supreme—its sympathy with the most distant portions of the race as well as with those of the same nation and neighbourhood, so that nothing human is alien from its regards—these are grand monuments and witnesses of the indirect influences of Christianity on civilisation: and wherever these things are

—or wherever only the spirit of society is pacific and not persecuting, wherever slavery is abolished and toleration is established—there is evidence of a Civilisation which may be largely auxiliary to Christianity ; and though we may not be able to recognise it as now co-existing with the directest means of Christian influence, we shall do well to think of it always with thankfulness and respect. For truly it may be much the fault of the Christian Church itself that civilisation is not now more under its direction. It once was so. The Christian Church once included in itself almost all the elements of progressive intellectual and moral and social life : but through not improving its trusts, they were taken away from it : and now it has come to pass that many of these elements have found their centres without the territory occupied by any ecclesiastical institutions, and have as it were built themselves up there on freehold foundations. Certainly no Church has for centuries now led civilisation—has neither shown any prophetic power in foretelling the course which civilisation would take, nor prepared it to take that which it ought. Almost every Church has set itself against some form of new knowledge or art which afterwards it has been obliged to recognise as a Divine gift, and thus has forfeited its claims to superiority in this region : until in these later generations all Churches have come to follow, with more or less reluctance, the course which an indefinite civilisation has compelled them to take, and society has stimulated the Church rather than the Church society. Indeed the Church has so abdicated its direct control over modern civilisation, and so put off or been deprived of, its powers of civil authority and guidance, that one can hardly say what of these it now

exclusively possesses. But then it should be remembered for our comfort, that if these powers have passed away from the Church, they have not passed away from the world: but rather have gone forth into it more widely and freely than might have been otherwise possible, and have multiplied therein beyond all measuring. And it would be well also if we took heed to this, that as the world considers that it is entitled to proportion its allegiance to the Church according to the measure of the Church's spiritual superiority to itself, so when the world without the Church is enabled to make good its claim on any region to a superior spiritual standing-place, there can be no other way of over-ruling its claims but by regaining and surpassing its practical positions. Always everywhere it is the same—the true way of conquering our adversaries is by converting them: of making men cease their several selfishnesses, is to realise for them a higher Gospel than they can do for themselves; of weaning them from the lower and winning them to the higher, is the exhibition of a purer justice, a nobler faith, and an all-embracing love.

XLIX.

The Christianity of the future.

And now what of the Future, its duties and its hopes? At least this, that the Future has larger duties and brighter hopes than the past has ever had. Of all things the most incredible is that the future should be no better than the past. If we believe in the mere Providence of GOD, it can hardly be that human history which has been progressive hitherto should be retrogressive henceforth, and that all the marvellous march of humanity should have been led on

through labour and through suffering and through conquest, to end in nothing more than it possesses now, or even in something less: but when we believe also in the Incarnation of GOD in CHRIST, the mere supposition of such a result can only be met with an instinctive rejection. Of the modes of this progression, indeed, none can prophesy, save indeed as they may do so suggestively from the analogies of the past, and the guidance of that great aim and ideal which lies involved in the very fact of the Immortal putting on mortality.

Fifty generations of mankind, however, and very many regions of the earth, have now enabled us to form some approximate estimate of the capacity of Christianity, and of the kind of influence which it is destined to exert upon mankind. We have now seen how Christianity has wrought upon nations as well as upon individuals, and how varieties of endowments have been elicited or exalted by it, and how it is capable of being received and exhibited in a Christendom made up of many peoples, though each of these may have been unable to embrace it in more than a fraction of its blessings. The nature of its mission and the mode of its operation may fairly now be judged of generally, though it would be wholly unreasonable to pronounce on the limits of its capabilities, or on the possible forms of its future manifestations. Doubtless new modifications of social and national life may be produced by it, and the rate of its progression may be very considerably accelerated. Eighteen centuries may be but the first term in a long series of triumphs which shall multiply themselves rapidly as they proceed. It may be questionable whether we shall ever see more noble specimens of individual worth and culture

than we have already had examples of in the history of the Church. One may more readily imagine that as the number of higher Christian products is multiplied, and the spread of an elementary Christianity is more extended, the individual will be more merged in the general body, and become more symmetrically developed, it may be, but scarcely more conspicuously exemplary. As the many increase, the few may decrease comparatively.

But however this may be with regard to individuals, we cannot but believe that Christianity must be the agent of great changes in the constitution of the society of the future: for much of the foundation of society as now existing is unjust and unchristian, and very much of it is below what it might be made to be. Christianity is intolerant of all injustice and unkindness, and seeks ever to root out selfishness from men and from man. It is indeed emphatically a spirit of universal unselfishness and of progress unto perfection for all: seeking ever to elevate the lowest to a level with the highest, and the highest to a position yet higher. In this sense it is a spirit of equality and fraternity among men, never resting until it be realised. It exorcises the spirit of caste, by recognising the equal potential worth of all human souls, and proclaiming the fact that all men stand in essentially the same relations to GOD in CHRIST. It teaches that GOD has made no generic or necessary differences and gradations among men permanently and universally obligatory, save only those of family relationships; that all other differences are only of degree and for a time: that any one may pass from the lowest degree to the highest that can do so by moral means; and in fact that there is no high degree

and no low but that which can be measured by a moral standard.

Christianity teaches also that there are no exclusive spiritual privileges among men: but that whatever one man is or knows all others may be or know: that every man ought to learn and to be taught all that he is able to receive; but one and the same truth and privilege for all: that the people are not distinguished from the rulers, or from the clergy, or from any others whatsoever, by any ordinance of GOD; but rather that any one who would attempt to draw an impassable line between themselves and others, is an Antichrist. What CHRIST Himself was He has expressed His will that all men should become, to the utmost measure of their capacity. To communicate Himself so that His disciples should even eat His flesh and drink His blood and thus have His life—this was the characteristic of the mind which was in CHRIST JESUS. And Christianity ought to be an embodiment in the whole constitution of humanity of this supernatural spirit—a realisation continually progressive of this otherwise inconceivable ideal of perfection. Universal human sympathy becomes thus at once a possibility and a duty for all Christians. Christianity being founded on the fact of a Divine Self-sacrifice, renders philanthropy an elementary condition of its grace, and has made the communication of its blessings to others one of the very means of our enjoying them more abundantly ourselves. It has thus introduced a new ideal of greatness among mankind, namely this, to serve, and not to rule, our brethren. The spectacle of one class lifting up another—of the happy toiling for the miserable—of the free vindicating the rights of the enslaved—of the

strong and the wise combining for the assistance of the weak and the ignorant—this is a peculiar product and distinctive duty of Christianity. Heathenism never knew anything of this, and knows nothing of it now. It never had, and has not now, any missionaries of truth and mercy to other peoples—no preachers of good tidings to the poor—no downward-looking compassionate regards—no wide-stretching spiritual beneficence. But Christianity counts mercy to man as sacrifice to GOD, and makes doing good to all men the best test of being good ourselves.

Indeed the importance of truth, and of the knowledge of truth to all men, this was unknown in any practical way to Heathenism, and may be considered as due essentially to Christianity. Christianity requires not merely truthfulness, but love of truth. The Divine Son of Man represented His mission to be very principally to bear witness to the truth: and that question which the highest civilisation of antiquity did not care to have answered, He has made through His Spirit a perpetual aspiration of His disciples. Christianity, in fact, has added many new cardinal virtues to the old Pagan ones, and among them this, neither the last nor the least of all, the desire of moral progress. To seek truth, and as it is found to live by it, and to impart it to others—to cherish true personal convictions concerning human and Divine relationships, and to diffuse them—every way to testify to the truth which we live by—this is a new birth of Christianity.

And Christianity also is the only religion which the world has ever seen which has shown unlimited faith in the power of truth to prevail over error, by leaving its disciples unprovided with an inflexible instrumentality for its pro-

pagation or its preservation—the only one which has simply sown principles believing them to be living powers which will produce all necessary rules of organisation, and destroy all evil in detail by cutting through its roots. Christianity fears nothing from truth, and nothing for it. It sanctions no shrinking from facts of any kind: declines no discussion, denies or evades no difficulty. It does not encourage any mental sluggishness or cowardice, but exhorts to the proving of all things, and the holding fast only of that which approves itself as good, and of which a man is thoroughly persuaded in his own mind. And thus has it become the parent of that which was unknown to ancient civilisation, but has become characteristic of modern—popular education.

Christianity however, it is true, does not directly denounce some social evils, and it does not directly define some social rights; nor does it furnish new instruments, or found new institutions, for realising its aims: but notwithstanding, it ever has been, and ever will be, indirectly the most powerful adversary of such evils, and advocate of such rights. It is silent concerning slavery and tyranny and war: it does not prescribe free political institutions, nor does it make mention of the cultivation of literature, nor of many modern benevolent associations: but to all social miseries and to all civilising agencies, it upholds the permanent and persuasive opponents and inducements respectively of the grand idea of brotherhood in redemption —its law of love, its principle of progress, and its standard of perfection.

L.

Is Christianity, then, a Final Revelation? For all the time and space that lie on this side heaven, it is. So long as man's being shall be one of discipline and probation, there will be no other means of grace or of progress than those which Christianity supplies. And why should there be? Essential Christianity is the complete re-union of the human and Divine—once realised in CHRIST, and thenceforth through Him made possible for all men. There is nothing limited in Christianity: mentally and morally it is (so to speak) open to the infinite. It is alien from no kind or form of good: and being bound up with the history and character of a Person, and with nothing else, is as flexible as humanity itself. Indeed being based only upon what is permanent and universal, and proposing for its perfect work the restoration of the Image of GOD in the heart of man, there can be nothing deeper, nothing larger conceivable by man than this. Christianity a final revelation.

And nowhere has there hitherto been manifested any faintest token of superiority to the Christian Ideal; nothing in any result or process of the highest civilisation which has the least perceptible tendency to supersede any distinctive portion of Christianity—nothing which proves itself on comparison more worthy, or which renders Christianity less necessary. Doubtless there may be, and there must be, exhibited in the future higher forms of Christianity than ever yet have been exhibited in the past: and something of all Theologies which have been hitherto identified with Christianity, and much of all social constitutions which have been its highest products, may have—will have—to pass

away; but this only on the ground that they really are not —whatever they may have seemed to be—a part of Christianity—but rather a hindrance to its development. But whatever of such things may be transitory, we may be sure of this, that which is, and which alone is, of the essence of Christianity; the Word, the Work, the Person, of CHRIST—this will not pass away. Sooner shall heaven and earth pass away than one jot of these. These have their everlasting witness in the very constitution of humanity—a fresh witness in every fresh heart; and as the ages roll on and mankind subsists, they will only appreciate more, and more affectionately adore, such brightness of the Father's glory, and so express an image of His Person. CHRIST'S words now rule the nations, and will rule them ever more and more: and His life which we see to be the rebuke of all past time is the yet unapproachable ideal of our future. CHRIST'S religion has never yet been approximately realised according to its idea: and it can only be superseded by being surpassed. But how surpass—as an end, or a means or a motive—that which recognises perfect love to GOD and man as the supreme aim of human life; which vouchsafes the HOLY SPIRIT as an Omnipresent Co-operator and Comforter in the work of human education; and which holds out as an attainment an endless future of perpetually increasing communion of the human with the Divine?

But the end—when shall that be?—that period of progression without relapse—of complete restoration of all things that are to be restored—that day when GOD shall once more survey these heavens and this earth, and everything that He has made, and say again, Behold it is very good—when shall this be? Of that day no man knows

nor can know now: when it shall come, and what even shall be the sign of its coming, we have no Revelation concerning these things; we only know that some time there will be—that there must be—a consummation of all earthly things, and the introduction of new heavens and a new earth wherein shall dwell only righteousness. And doubtless this time may be at any time. So inscrutable are the ways of GOD, and so different has the history of the past been from anything we could have abstractedly conceived, that there may possibly be some winding up of our present dispensation wholly different from anything of which we have any parallel in the past, or any token in the present. It would be wholly irreverent to deny that there may not lie before us some sudden catastrophe of evil, or some equally sudden manifestation of glory, which though wholly beyond all anticipation of ours, may hereafter prove itself to our enlarged apprehensions as the most fitting conclusion of the ages of human history upon earth. And that there so frequently has been a fervent faith in Christian souls that there would be, and will be, such a termination of all present things, may well be allowed by those who trust much to the teaching of the Indwelling Spirit in the Church, at first sight to take much from the seeming unreasonableness which such a view would otherwise be deemed to present. But still to those adopting the other principles of these pages, such a view must ultimately appear so much founded upon false methods of Scriptural interpretation, and inadequate conceptions both of the general government of GOD and of the special mission of Christianity, that they may nevertheless be regarded with no more than the respect which is due

to all persuasions of piety however little allied to the soundest and ripest wisdom. The principles of these pages would lead us the rather to conjecture that the end of the world will come only when the whole earth has been replenished and subdued as much as man's natural powers will allow, and when the spiritual influences of Christianity shall have effected the last victory over the sinfulness of man which is possible under a dispensation of moral freedom and probation. When there is no soul living on the earth which has not been subjected to the influences which are fittest for its trial and its judgment, then shall the end come—amidst the most crowded generation of mankind—a generation, it may be, not dying but only being changed—mortality being for them insensibly abolished, and time as imperceptibly dissolved into eternity. And what shall come then? Two states which in the dimness of mortal vision stand for the expressions of the superlatives of good and evil—of the fulness of life and death—states of being whose special conditions are unsearchable and insoluble as yet on any principles either of reason or of Revelation—with regard to one of which there may be illimitable faith and joy, and with regard to the other of which the utmost we can now do is to be silent and to fear—never either to dogmatise or to despair.

Putting aside, then, all consideration of an abrupt termination of the present state of things—not with impatient denial, but only with patient doubt, and fully recognising the duty of constant watchfulness—it may be permissible to state what kind of future appears on the principles of these pages, to lie before us for some long while yet. It is

true that all expressions of opinion concerning the position of our age in reference to the world's future history must ever be liable to the charge of presumptuous prophesying, but if only suggested as illustrations of the spirit and tendency of the principles which are here commended to the attention of the thoughtful, they may be instructive, and cannot be on this ground alone offensive. And as such, and such only—and more with a view of guarding against the reception of such principles too passively, by showing the kind of results they naturally lead to than for the sake of the intrinsic worth of such speculations—it is here said, that one who holds the principles of these pages, cannot but look forward to the future with indefinite hopefulness. He will anticipate indeed many alternations of cloud and of sunshine over any particular region of the world and of the Church, but he will believe in the continually increasing prevalence of light over the whole: he will admit and expect many a partial ebbing of the blessed tide of spiritual life, but he will adhere despite all temporary contradictions to the conviction of so general and permanent a flow as shall ensure the ultimate diffusion of Christianity over the largest portions of the earth.

But it is in the spiritual and practical region rather than in the intellectual that great things are on such principles to be hoped for. Continued Christian and scientific culture of the mind may possibly make some few hereafter more foreseeing and prophetic than any are now; but man's theory of the spiritual heavens will probably for ever remain to him not materially less incomplete than at present. In the region of the spiritual and the practical, however, there need be no limit to our hope. Were

practical Christianity but once prevalent—were all those who are Christians under such various names, altogether, or even only almost, Christians in heart—how speedily would society outrun all the calculations or even visions of social science. How many evils now considered ineradicable would of necessity disappear. The New Commandment of CHRIST—now grown old to the world's ear, but yet fresh as at first to every new-born heart—the love of each other as He has loved us—this contains within itself the inexhaustible means of the world's regeneration. Love to GOD, love to man—in and through CHRIST both GOD and man—herein is a doctrine and a practice which, monotonous and elementary as it may seem, will ever to the last enkindle a new enthusiasm, and exert a new influence of healing and of blessing. If men did really love one another as CHRIST has loved them all—what might not happen then? And in proportion as they do so love each other, all good things will follow fast. If only henceforth more and more that should be done from love which is now done from fear, and a Divine charity should take the place of a selfish prudence—if every man did what he could for his neighbour, or even only exacted from him no more than his due—then what hope for the world might spring up here, and how might half its present miseries be lessened, and more than half its present burdens be lightened. And if Christians should ever become the majority of mankind, how different might then be not only the blessedness of the world's condition, but also the rate of the world's progression.

When we think indeed of the inherent power of Christianity, and of how much of this power has hitherto lain

latent, we may well believe that future ages may look back upon ours as upon one of the dark ages of man's history, and may think of us more with reference to the imbecility of spiritual infancy, than to the maturity of Christian manhood. And surely looking at man only naturally we might say that there is no token of any failing of strength in his nature now compared with any period of the past. The world would seem as full of moral life and power in our time as ever it was at any time—giving birth to new products of individual thought and will, and to new social combinations, as worthy as any that have preceded them. Verily man seems now in his capabilities whatever he has been at any time: and the world is not yet worn out. Nay, rather there are now signs in the firmament both of the world and of the Church that a higher era is about to be. There seems now at least an abdication or deposition of all thrones and dominions which hitherto have opposed progression: and amidst much confusion of old things, much space also clearing for some better new things to be built up. There has arisen among the most advanced peoples a new and vigorous impulse towards a higher social organisation than has yet been exhibited among men—an organisation which shall be more and more built upon the groundwork of a mutual co-operation instead of on that of a selfish competition—which shall establish a scale of ranks in society graduated according to the natural ascent of gifts and powers and moral attainments, rather than according to any arbitrary or artificial distinctions—and which shall make the power of the whole equally control the exercise of the strength of the strong, and bear something of the burdens of the weak. A fusion of nations, too, and

an assimilation of races—an abolition of barriers and an intercommunion of all human interests—these things are beginning visibly to take place. Throughout the best portions of the earth, slavery has begun to die, and the spirit of liberty has won immeasurable conquests which can never be revoked, but must ever be extended. All institutions based upon distinctions arbitrary and not natural, conventional and not moral, are decaying daily, and sooner or later will fall before that spirit of brotherhood which Christianity tends continually to cherish and to spread. And in the high places of Christendom too—in the regions more especially religious—there is now a clearer recognition of this great principle of Christain brotherhood than ever there has been hitherto : a stronger feeling of the true catholicity of Christianity, and a deeper sense of the happiness it would be to realise it more truly and more widely. Prejudices and passions which have separated Christians for ages are beginning to disappear, and there has sprung up instead a sympathy for varied forms of Christian life and a recognition of good amidst traditional corruptions, which promises the coming of a time when Christians shall approximate to union by each borrowing from his neighbour their peculiar treasures and acknowledging each other's natural gifts, and thus proclaim to the world at large, in different forms, the manifold works of their common Lord. Indeed the grand idea of a spiritual society uniting by invisible bonds those separated by visible barriers — subduing national differences by the stronger affinities of faith and worship—the idea of a vast kingdom on earth which shall be a type of the kingdom of heaven—this is the desire—that is the presentiment—which even

now is blindly agitating all modern civilisation. Only indeed after many generations, it may be, will there be any near prospect of its realisation. And doubtless often before then will men's inmost souls be sickened by the repeated deferring of their hopes through human selfishness and sin; yet with the passing of every age will some good from its struggles survive—sufficient to serve the next with materials for fresh hope, and with means of new progression. And thus those of keenest eye to perceive the evil of the present, need nevertheless not be slow of heart to believe the good of the future, and those too apt to hope, need not blind themselves to the fearfulness of that which is. Those indeed whose minds and hearts have been equally tempered by the experiences of history and elevated by the capacities of Christianity, will perhaps be the most steady to the faith that man's history is a progression—that his failures and his sufferings will work together for his good—and that, therefore, though generations and generations may pass away before these high things come to pass, yet there will assuredly come some period in the future when Christianity shall be shown to be a reality for earth as well as an inheritance in heaven—when the Gospel of CHRIST shall be the supreme law of man, and when there shall be constituted practically, if not formally, a Christendom one and indivisible. Verily it is the night of the world that is far spent, it is its day that is at hand: and despite all the fearful infirmities and iniquities of this present generation, we shall do well to believe that a new era for humanity is yet in reserve—an era of continually growing light and love: and that the angelic song first heard at the Nativity of the Gospel shall not be always only as aerial

music without echo upon earth, but shall surely though gradually swell into the great Apocalyptic hymn, and be faithfully and forever responded to by multitudes whom no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and peoples and tongues, world without end. AMEN.

THE END OF THE FOURTH BOOK.

POSTSCRIPT.

On reviewing and revising the statements contained in the preceding pages at several annual intervals, and in finally taking leave of them, the writer is anxious to commend them to the earnest and patient attention of any who may read them, as it is only by carefulness and by candour that, with their abounding imperfections, they can be of service in supplying Biblical and Theological students with any satisfaction for their doubts or with any solutions of their difficulties. Indeed these thoughts have in some degree been purposely set down in such a form as was deemed likely to repulse the impatient: for those who do not bring the one elementary qualification of patience to the consideration of subjects which are some of the most important and difficult which can occupy the human mind, and to the judgment of opinions which have been formed and recorded and revised during a period of many years, it was thought might well be deterred from their perusal.

And the writer is also anxious distinctly to state that throughout this book, from first to last, there are embodied in it thoughts and expressions which he has derived from the writings of others: and that he had abstained from particular references to them only from the deliberate judgment which experience has forced upon him, that

such subjects as those treated of in these pages can only secure from many an impartial attention when the discussion concerning them is wholly impersonal. In any other case he would have been delighted to acknowledge the slightest of these—as he deems such things among the greatest of obligations; and in the present case, he begs every reader to do that for him which he has been thus prevented from doing himself, wherever he thinks that any thought, or form of thought, which he values may be due to any other than the present writer.

And for the similar reason of not distracting attention from the mere worth of the thoughts themselves, those numerous references to ancient and other authorities which it might have been well to introduce, if these thoughts had been specially addressed to the learned, have also been omitted. But it should be remembered that these thoughts are professedly not addressed especially to the learned, but rather to those with whom the writer has much more sympathy—the men of merely average cultivation, living in the world and making a portion of its work the greatest portion of theirs, yet who would fain have some intelligent convictions in that large region of spiritual and speculative interest which is constituted by Biblical and Theological studies, and who being unable to attain such by their own investigations alone, are ready to receive any suggestions from others who have given to such subjects more especial attention. And also he will here add, that these thoughts may perhaps be read to the best advantage if not judged of as an adequately developed whole, but rather as a mere selection from out of such a whole of such portions as the writer deemed it most profitable should be considered now

—a selection not wholly without continuous connection, but at the same time oftenest presenting mere suggestions and summaries, instead of expositions, of arguments, which in order to be duly influential must be expanded by the reader for himself.

But whatever be the source or the measure of the worth of any of these thoughts, perhaps but little good can come from reading them to any who have not already been severely exercised by doubt and struggle in those regions of Biblical and Theological study with which they are concerned. Personal experience of the difficulties and disappointments attending such studies, is almost indispensable to give that earnestness of spirit which can alone render such imperfect suggestions profitable: and much that is spoken here must fall to the ground if this be absent. But if any so exercised shall with sincerity of heart and openness of mind continue for long to engage in such studies on the principles of this book, the writer of it believes that there will at length come a time when they will grow more peaceful and more assured of the foundations of their faith: and that though somewhat of their old creed will probably drop into desuetude, yet that which remains will be so strengthened and purified that it will more than ever vindicate its superiority—yea, its supremacy—over all else on earth. And many perhaps who have already been so engaged for long may now be able to confirm the testimony which one at least is able to furnish, namely this, That after many years of daily study of the Scriptures on the principles of these pages, there is now no scrutiny into their claims—no criticism of their contents—no questioning of their evidences—

which he fears will ever deprive them of their title to be substantially a Divine Revelation : and that any scepticism that is sincere he can henceforth listen to at once with sympathy and without foreboding : because he has hitherto risen from a consideration of the thoughts of the freest and strongest intellects with an increasing wonder at how little that is really essential to such a character is affected by the conclusions of the truest learning, and an equally increasing conviction that there resides a spirit of blessing in the Scriptures stronger than any strong man, however armed, can conquer or cast out.

But from those who know little of this peculiar mental discipline, or its results, there will probably arise many objections to this book; and among many other suppressed but instinctive interrogatories may be these—Why moot such questions as are here discussed? Why disturb that tranquil reverence for Biblical interpretations and Theological doctrines which, though broken here and there it is true, generally prevails at present in our country? And must not danger arise to the cause of Evangelical Religion—which is so repeatedly acknowledged in these pages to be the highest of all causes —from such discussions? To these and the like questions it is answered, that in the writer's judgment—a judgment which the years which have passed over since the preface to this book was written have tended much to confirm —such tranquillity and reverence as are here supposed do not now exist : that the minds of very many are at this time greatly disturbed by such questions ; and that there is no possibility of further postponing the discussion of them. And not only this, but he believes it is the duty of

every man when he clearly perceives an error to abandon it himself, and to teach others to do the like: and that the more sacred are the subjects with which such errors are connected, the more anxious ought we to be to free ourselves from them. The writer of this book also believes that, to the extent stated in it, the common belief of his brethren concerning the letter of the Sacred Scriptures, and some theological deductions from this, are not true—have no foundation in fact—are the rather contrary to the reality: and that to believe or teach anything which is not true concerning a revelation of truth cannot be right, or even safe—cannot have any advantages of any kind. To him also it seems that the notion that if these things be true they can be more dangerous than the errors they would supplant, is in itself a dangerous error: and that this notion therefore itself demands an earnest protest from every man who would be true to truth. Danger, doubtless, there is and ever must be in a world full of error when truth is spoken. But danger to what, and to whom? To the truth and its disciples? No: to error and to its disciples—as there ought to be. Our only Master has said that He is the Truth, and that the great end for which He came into the world was to bear witness to the truth, and that they that are of the truth are His, and they alone. Let us put away from us then all such false-hearted thoughts as these: for verily distrust of truth is a very advanced form of Infidelity as to the Providence of GOD, and as he that loveth truth comes always to the light, so he that wilfully even worships in the dark, is on the road to idolatry and sin.

To those indeed who cannot perceive any infirmity in much of our present theories, there may well seem no

occasion for such discussions as this book contains: but then also for them there need equally be no fear of them. If they have faith in truth and their own convictions, this will give them peace: and if they have not, they must needs be in our days all their lifetime subject to bondage—if not from this subject from some other: and little can be done for such but to give them, with earnest kindness, the exhortation to absorb all their energies in some portion of the ever-extending field of practical Christian benevolence —which is a region in which faith rapidly grows strong, and hope keeps even pace with every labour of love. But for those who judge otherwise of the present condition of large portions of the Christian Church, and with whom the considerations adduced in these pages have weight, the only question can be concerning the mode of the removal of the error. It cannot but seem a work of wisdom and of charity to endeavour to remove that which they believe must sooner or later, if left to the action of merely natural forces, come down ruinously, and perhaps must hurt in its fall, or even bury in its ruins, some of those who have been living listlessly under its shelter and its shadow. Doubtless such an operation requires to be effected with all attainable skill and gentleness: and certainly if there be deemed anything in these pages of an irreverent or impatient, or even ignorant, handling, there ought to be no sparing of censure, nor any suppression of the vehemence of a just indignation: for few faults can well be greater, and few evils more lamentable, than that such should ever be the case. But then after all it must be remembered that such protest would avail only against the particular workman, and not against the work itself.

And as to the degree in which this matter presses, this cannot but be determined by various persons according to their various experiences. And it is not denied that there are many sections of Christian society, and many individual cases, in which such discussion could not be so conducted as to be made otherwise than only indirectly profitable, or perhaps be prevented from becoming otherwise than directly injurious. But in general it may surely be said that the faith even of the most pious might be improved by being purified, and that no spiritual interest of any man can be really promoted by having human errors mixed up with his interpretations of Divine revelations. And as a matter of experience we find it true, that the common creed on these subjects is productive of great evils even to the best of those who hold it. It not only puts them out of sympathy, and therefore out of connection, with a large number of minds and hearts that would fain possess a stronger faith in the Gospel than they have, but are hindered from obtaining it more by mental difficulties than by any other, to whom they might be otherwise of much use in imparting some spiritual gift: but it also prevents their own progress in the perception of the fulness of Gospel grace, and light, and liberty. It involves them in a hopeless state of confusion with regard to a comprehension of a just outline of GOD'S dispensations to men in the past, and but too often fills their minds with the most strange and fearful anticipations for the future: while it also leads them still further to a partial misdirection of their energies, and consequent waste of effort in many matters of practical Christian benevolence. Already hitherto have the interests of religion been sadly injured with many

by the maintenance of all manner of Theologies falsely so called, which have been constructed, by very Christian persons, on these principles of Biblical interpretation. In late times, how sad have been the disputes on Biblical principles concerning questions which the Bible rightly understood cannot be considered as undertaking to decide: and in our own, what strange exegetical immoralities have been committed in order to reconcile the supposed Revelations of the Bible with the progressive discoveries of science.

And though we may smile or sigh at the remembrance of the ignorance of the past, and may deem ourselves little likely to fall into the same fault again, we must remember that it is only by carrying out the same kind of concessions which have been extorted in this region voluntarily and fairly into other regions, that we can be prevented from exhibiting again and again the same kind of melancholy spectacle. And the need for this now is naturally the more pressing in consequence of the errors of the past. For the world will not forget, and theologian would themselves do well to remember, that the interests of Revelation have often been declared to be so bound up with the maintenance of certain positions of interpretation as that all would fall if these were surrendered, and yet these have been forced, and so permanently taken possession of, that all possibility of regaining them is confessedly at an end. It is true that nothing has followed in each case but the disproof of the prophets' mission by the happy failure of their prophecies: but this disproof having been now so frequently repeated, the belief in the superior wisdom of theologians, or at least of their principles of Biblical inter-

pretation, has been so weakened that the more thoughtful of private students have been thrown back upon original investigations, and are substituting for their old-established reverence for authoritative credenda, a faith formed and limited by a personal examination and free development of the characteristic principles of Revelation. And though in many cases, and perhaps in most eventually, this is a change which may not be to be regretted, yet effected as it has been not by the spontaneous exhortations of the interpreters themselves to search the Scriptures, but by the resistance of the unprofessional to the dictates of authority, it may very possibly for a while be accompanied by evils which we would fain have avoided. At least it should be remembered that there are few things more destructive of the stability of faith in very many than the necessity of abandoning their earliest and most cherished views. A faith which has been much shifted—which has been pulled up from one soil and transplanted to another very different one—seldom henceforth thrives aright, but bears the marks of its rude treatment visible on it until the end. It would behove us then on this ground alone to be assiduously careful that if we cannot wholly undo the evil that has already been done in the case of our contemporaries, we teach the next generation nothing as fundamental truth but what is not liable to be rooted up or overthrown by modes of thought and achievements of science or of scholarship, the germs of which we can discern in this our time. It may not be necessary for us, in order to maintain our honesty or to repair our errors, to labour strenuously to undo, or even to disturb, all the subordinate inaccuracies which the present generation may have been taught by us;

but to prevent the next from learning what it may seem to us probable it may have to unlearn, is among the very elements of Christian charity, and even of religious prudence.

And so far as we can see, there remains nothing for the future for some while yet but a long course of investigation and speculation—of criticism and scepticism, and of every kind of discussion—concerning many of the details of Biblical Theology: there is certainly no ground of hope at present within view for believing in any universal or general reception of such matters on the basis of mere authority. That Protestantism in which we glory and rejoice has so rejected the notion that there is any supreme tribunal of opinion existing upon earth, that it is wholly impossible to restore it. And if there be no ultimate authority on earth how can there be any other obligatory Theology than that which each man's conscientious judgment makes for himself? Protestantism has made this impossible, and it must accept the consequences of its own deeds, in the faith that as they were substantially good, no preponderating evil need follow them. And so with regard to the interpretation of the Bible, it must be remembered that to search the Scriptures is the very watchword of Protestantism; the invitation to all men to come and see what there is in them, and judge for themselves, has been so freely given, even by the most rigidly theological, that there is no possibility of revoking it. And when myriads of differing minds do search and see what things such a complex collection of writings does contain—when the rigorous examination both of its evidences and its contents so freely challenged is earnestly undertaken and thoroughly carried on—the result is not,

and cannot be expected to be, uniformly the same simple one. And in the process of time, with the growth of new sources of information, as well as with fresh powers of investigation, a change has certainly taken place in some of the more enlightened regions of Christendom in men's ways of regarding some portions of long-established theoretic faith. If this change be wholly erroneous it ought to be impartially examined, and patiently and clearly shown to be so: and if any portion of truth should be found to lie in it, that portion ought to be thankfully acknowledged and incorporated into the old belief. It is only by doing this, that a large class of earnest and intelligent minds can be so tranquillised and satisfied as to be prepared to listen to the ulterior teachings of a mature Christianity. So many of such are now engaged with this great question of the significance and authority of the Bible, and are urging on their investigations and speculations with such laborious and patient zeal, that they can never be induced to abandon them, unless they be won from them by the irresistible forces of manly argument and Christian sympathy combined. And indeed it might be said more generally, that the imminent questions of our future are all of a character so much deeper and more solemn than any of those to which we have been accustomed of late, that it will be wholly insufficient for any good purpose, for the most pious or the most dignified, simply to ignore or to contradict or to denounce them; and that it can only be well for any to meet them with candour and with courage, and in a spirit tempered as much by a thoughtful tolerance as by a zealous indignation.

However, therefore, at first sight it may seem to some to be a dangerous and irreverent act to attempt in any way to deduct from the sacredness which has become attached so closely to the very letter of Scripture, it is hoped that a more continued and comprehensive view of the peculiarities of our position in the present day—of its difficulties and obligations—will tend to modify this primary impression. For truly such prolonged view will make it evident that this position of ours is very different from that of any in the old time before us. Strong lights have now been thrown on our Sacred Writings from many quarters, and cannot be kept from resting upon them: and these lights, while they render more luminous very much of the great globe of Scripture, are found also to multiply and deepen its partial shadows, so that it is impossible now to deny or to doubt the inequality of the surface on which they fall. As what seems plain, or even smooth, to the common sight, to the armed eye seems often quite rough with multiplied unevennesses, so may and will many a portion of Sacred Scripture which used to appear to common apprehension quite even and round, when subjected to higher powers of criticism, appear all beset with ruggedness and with shadows. But have we been losers on the whole by the telescope or the microscope? Surely not: and so neither shall we be by the highest criticism man will ever be enabled to devise. In this region of celestial revelation, and in these kingdoms of spiritual life, it is and it ever will be, as in the material universe and in animated nature, if our discoveries have to be readjusted from time to time, our knowledge and our wonder grow equally with our progress: and as our intellectual

position is raised, and our powers and opportunities of observation are enlarged, our difficulties are increased in proportion as our enjoyment and edification are promoted. Verily our responsibility and our privilege become thus exceeding great, and it is but the few who can bear them calmly. The vocation of the Christian scholar is indeed in our day indefinitely noble: but demanding gifts and graces of no common kind for its adequate fulfilment, and imposing a burden which none but those who are strengthened from within and from above can for long support. But he who is conscious of any measure of such strength, and knows how it may be increased according to his need, will never attempt to get rid of responsibility by turning aside from duty, or hope for peace only by avoiding light. And he who thus is faithful at first in a few things, becomes in time ruler over many things: and if his creed grows simpler, his faith grows firmer: and that which once was a stumbling-block henceforth becomes a stepping-stone to his progress. And surely the faith of one who, through such experience, has come to fear no scrutiny of scholarship or of science into the records which he receives as the material of his creed, is a higher testimony to the worth of those records than the multiplied repetitions of allegiance on the part of those who protest against inquiry very much because they fear it, and who, ever approaching the subject as bondsmen, never can hope to retire from it as masters.

And so far as the writer of these pages can judge, after many years' consideration of some of the results of the latest criticism, there is nothing whatever to fear for essential Christianity from the freest possible inquiry and the most unreserved appeal to the reason and conscience

of mankind. Exactly the reverse: he believes that reason and conscience are on the side of Christianity and the Bible: that the more they are fairly appealed to, the more favourably and the more forcibly they will witness: and that these are allies which none can ultimately conquer. So far, too, as he knows, there are a greater number of the most powerful and cultured minds of Europe at this time more believing than at any other time since the great religious revolution. It is very true that modern philosophy and scholarship and science combined have made of late a scrutiny of the Sacred Writings more thorough and remorseless than has ever been made since those writings challenged the faith of mankind: and it is also true that this scrutiny has obliged most persons who have followed it with honest interest to look henceforth upon incidental portions of our Sacred Records as less obligatory upon our belief as direct Revelation, or as less adapted for our instruction, than of old time they were supposed to be. But then it should also be equally understood that only by a few of such persons are such modifications of opinion considered as interfering with the characteristics of the Gospel of CHRIST, while with most the effect has been to make only more manifest—from what remains unaccomplished of what was attempted—how impregnable are the foundations of the Christian faith by even the most formidable assaults of metaphysical philosophy or historical criticism.

But a grief beyond all other grief which could possibly befall him would it be to the writer of these pages, if any word in them should tend to lessen the amount of true reverence for the Bible in any heart—whether in that of

one who has already received its great truths in the love of them, or in that of one who hitherto has not done so but yet is seeking so to do. Most unhappy, indeed, would be such a result both for them and for him : and therefore he very earnestly exhorts every one who reads these pages to do so with the utmost sincerity and patience, and the severest scrutiny of their spirit as well as of their letter, and to reject unhesitatingly whatever in them he may deliberately deem to be unevangelical. There can be nothing more true and more holy—more emphatically Divine—than the mind which was in CHRIST JESUS as exhibited in our New Testament. Let the ultimate appeal then be ever to that : and be sure that wherever this book speaks not according to that, it is because there is no light in it.

The writer bids the reader farewell with the aspiration —which may GOD convert into a Benediction—The Grace of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, and the Love of GOD, and the Fellowship of the HOLY GHOST, be with you evermore. AMEN.

19*th September* 1848.

THE END.

COLSTON AND SON, PRINTERS, EDINBURGH.

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Catholic thoughts on the Bible and
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